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**Working-Class Internationalism and
the Appeal of National Identity:
Historical Debates and Current
Perspectives**

**Edited by
Patrick Pasture
and
Johan Verberckmoes**

Para hacer fotocopias
es de Santi



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Social Solidarity and National Identity in the Basque Country: The Case of the Nationalist Trade Union ELA/STV

Ludger Mees

The Current Importance of the Issue: 100 Years of Nationalism in the Basque Country

When exactly 100 years ago Sabino de Arana y Goiri founded the first cell of the Basque Nationalist Party, the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV), none of his few followers in the petty bourgeoisie of Bilbao would have been able even in his wildest dreams to imagine a situation one century later, in which nationalism would be the dominant ideology in society.¹ When the young, charismatic leader died prematurely in 1903, not only did his political enemies prophesy that the whole movement would soon follow its founder to the grave; even his successor as head of the nationalist party, Angel Zabala, confessed in his memoirs his doubts and fears when he took over the chairmanship, at the request of his mortally sick friend Sabino.²

Nevertheless, Zabala and the subsequent leaders of the PNV continued the work of Sabino Arana and successfully created step by step the basis of a strong social movement that is nowadays dominant in the three

1. I am grateful to the participants in the International Conference on *Nationalist and Regionalist Dilemmas for Collective Action* (Leuven, 1995) for their thoughtful comments on that earlier version. A special debt is owed to my colleagues from the University of Santiago de Compostela (Spain), Xosé Manoel Núñez, and from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium) Patrick Pasture and Johan Verberckmoes, who took time to read the first draft and to comment on it critically. The University of the Basque Country provided my colleagues Josu Chueca, Santiago de Pablo and myself with a grant for the research on the history of the nationalist unions ELA (Basque) and ZZP (Polish). This article is one of the first results of that research project.

2. Kondaño (=Angel Zabala), *Primeros años del nacionalismo*, 52.

Basque provinces of Alava, Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia, which since 1979 form the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, also exercising an important political influence in the province of Navarra, that nationalists consider historically Basque even if it forms its own and separate Autonomous Community. A few pieces of information might help to underline the strength of the Basque nationalist movement:

Since the process of redemocratisation of the post-Francoist Spanish state, the historical nationalist party PNV has been the most voted-for party in all the elections that have been held up to now. Even in the context of a general retrogression of nationalist ideology due to the extreme bipolarisation of Spanish politics between the socialist party of the former president Felipe González and the conservative opposition headed by José María Aznar, the PNV reached nearly 30 per cent of the votes in the elections to the regional Basque parliament of October 1994, surpassing the 300,000 votes mark for the first time in its history. The distance from the second placed party, the Basque section of the Spanish socialist party PSOE, was 13 per cent and about 130,000 votes. The total vote-sharing of the three nationalist parties in the Basque Regional Parliament reached 56.44 per cent. In the general elections of 1996 – characterized like those of 1993 by the bipolar confrontation between Spanish socialists and conservatives – this percentage dropped down to 46.2 per cent. The parliamentary support of moderate Basque and Catalan nationalists permitted Aznar to achieve the presidency of the Spanish government.

Table 1. Vote-sharing of the nationalist parties in the elections to the Spanish and Basque parliaments (in per cent)

	EG 77	EG 79	EA 80	EG 82	EA 84	EG 86	EA 86	EG 89	EA 90	EG 93	EA 94	EG 96
PNV	28.8	27.6	38.0	32.0	42.0	28.0	23.7	22.7	28.5	23.9	29.9	25.4
HB	4.3	15.0	16.5	14.8	14.6	17.8	17.5	16.8	18.3	14.5	16.3	12.5
EE	6.3	8.0	9.8	7.7	8.0	9.1	10.9	8.8	7.8			
EA							15.8	11.1	11.4	9.8	10.3	8.3
Other			0.9		1.0							

Note: EG = Elecciones Generales (Span. parl.); EA = Elecciones Autonómicas (Basque parl.); HB did not yet exist in 1977. The vote-percentages correspond to two parties that later integrated in HB (ANV and ESB); Others: ESEI (1980) and Auzolan (1984).

Sources: Llera, *Los Vascos y la política*, 158/9; *El Diario Vasco*, 24 October 1995; Euskadi 96, 39.

This dominant position in the political sphere corresponds to an even more dominant role of Basque nationalism in social life. The moderate nationalist trade union *Eusko Langileen Alkartasuna* (ELA, in Spanish *Solidaridad de Trabajadores Vascos*), founded in 1911, is the strongest

Table 2. Delegates of the different trade unions elected in the elections 1994/5 (in per cent)

	ELA	UGT	CC.OO.	LAB	Others
Alava	30.65	22.70	16.10	11.86	15.0
Bizkaia	39.76	17.88	17.66	12.12	9.73
Gipuzkoa	45.30	9.86	15.21	22.32	3.80
Navarra	20.64	32.23	20.24	11.52	11.54
Total CAPV	40.21	15.86	16.55	15.64	8.51
Total EH	35.96	19.41	17.35	14.74	9.17

Note: ELA = *Eusko Langileen Alkartasuna*, moderate nationalist union; LAB: *Langile Abertzaleen Batzordeak*, radical nationalist union; UGT = socialist *Unión General de Trabajadores*; CC.OO. = *Comisiones Obreras*, leftist union; Total CAPV = total results in the *Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco*; Total EH: results in *Euskal Herria* (= CAPV+Navarra).

Source: Internal document from ELA, Bilbao 30 October 1995.

trade union in the Basque provinces. In the elections of the worker-representatives in Basque companies held in 1994/5 40.21 per cent of all these delegates elected in the three provinces of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country were members of ELA. Another 15.64 per cent belonged to the other radical-nationalist trade union, LAB.

These brief figures demonstrate the important role played by nationalism in the pluralistic Basque society, and we could easily complete this impression with further information about the Catholic Church, the education system, sport and even about the micro-sociological behaviour of the Basques in the gastronomic societies or the groups of friends (*cuadrillas*) as informal structures of transmission of nationalist messages. In this scenario the nationalist terrorism of ETA is, despite its international echo, a more marginal than typical phenomenon.³

The Theoretical Background: Class and Nation in Marxist Thought

As we have already indicated by the figures concerning the results of the elections in the Basque enterprises, one of the most singular characteristics of this ascendant evolution of Basque nationalism during the last hundred years is its penetration of a huge part of the Basque working class, a process that led to the formation of the nationalist union ELA in 1911.

3. Among the multiple studies concerning the problem of violence and terrorism in the Basque Country see Garmendia, *Historia de ETA*; Jáuregui, *Ideología y estrategia política de ETA*; Clark, *The Basque Insurgents*; Waldmann, *Militanter Nationalismus im Baskenland*; Sullivan, *ETA and Basque Nationalism*; Linz, *Conflicto en Euskadi*; Gurruchaga, *El código nacionalista vasco durante el franquismo*; Pérez-Agote, *La reproducción del nacionalismo*.

This organisational strength of nationalism in the world of labour in the Basque Country reflects a specific historical reality not shared by the other two historical peripheral nationalisms in the Spanish state, since neither the Galician nor the Catalan nationalists were able to create their own nationalist trade unions.⁴ This coexistence, or better, confrontation between socialist unions on the one hand, and nationalist ones on the other, intensified the contention existing in the frame of the political system between the PNV and the socialist PSOE. In other words: in the Basque case, the old discussion about the relation between class and nation was conducted with extreme vigour and toughness.

In fact this discussion is as old as modern society itself. In the course of the European 'Double-Revolution' (E. J. Hobsbawm) after the end of the eighteenth century, the genesis of the national movements took place. For the rising liberal bourgeoisie the term 'nation' was an important weapon in the fight against the Ancien Régime and the emancipation from absolutist, aristocratic and clerical oppression. In the programme of the liberal bourgeoisie, the new nation-state was supposed to be the guardian of the two crucial principals of European liberalism: the idea of national sovereignty and that of the equality of all citizens before the law.

Parallel to the emergence of the national movements, the process of socio-economic modernisation revolutionised the structures of society. Capitalism and industrialisation pushed the traditional agrarian and aristocratic society of estates from the stage of history, introducing the new capitalist class society. Since in most European countries the new leading class, the bourgeoisie, was forced to form at least partial alliances with the traditional aristocratic elites, now clearly and consciously on the defensive, the main class conflict was no longer that between bourgeoisie and aristocracy, but that between bourgeoisie and working class. The revolution of 1848 contributed to minimising the popular character of liberalism by the increasing separation between 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian' democracy.⁵ In Germany, it was this context of an extremely weak bourgeoisie, unable to carry out its own revolution in 1848 and since the Bismarckian national unification in 1870/1 definitively on the other side

4. There are, nevertheless, the exceptions of the Catalanist organisation of the white-collar workers in Barcelona, the CADCI (*Centre Autonomista de Dependents del Comerç i Industria*), founded in 1903, and the Galician union CIG (*Confederación Intersindical Galega*), which dates back to 1974. For more information concerning these unions see Lladanosa, *Catalanisme i moviment obrer* and Beramendi and Núñez Seixas, *O nacionalismo galego*, 287-94.

5. Mayer, *Radikalismus und bürgerliche Demokratie*, 108-78.

of the barricade, that inspired the work of Marx and Engels, the classics of the socialist worker movement.⁶ For Marx it was evident that as the confrontation between bourgeoisie and proletariat was the inevitable mission of history, so was the fight of the workers against all the bourgeois ideologies, among which nationalism took a prominent place. Nationalism was nothing other than the attempt of the bourgeoisie to divide the workers by diverting their attention from the only decisive conflict, the class conflict. Consequently, the *Communist Manifesto*, the official doctrine of Marxist thought, was summed up in the famous sentence that the worker has no fatherland. His task was to join together under the flag of socialist internationalism with the workers of other states in order to carry on the world-wide revolution. In the few writings of Marx and Engels on the national question only those national movements had the right to exist that due to their relatively highly developed socio-economic and political structures would be able to give a strong impulse to the productive forces, and thus to the class struggle and the socialist revolution. All the other small nations, 'nations without history' in the term of Friedrich Engels, among which he included *expressis verbis* also the Basque,⁷ were intrinsically reactionary relics of feudalism, which the dialectic of history would condemn to perish as well as the Ancien Régime.

As is well known, the evolution of history forced a certain revision of the traditional Marxist orthodoxy. The theses of Karl Renner and especially Otto Bauer at the beginning of the twentieth century were a consequence of the increasing impact of the national question in the different sections of the Social Democratic Party in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Austro-Marxists tried to overcome the traditional Marxist determinism of the national question being an ideological instrument of the bourgeoisie. In some sense, Otto Bauer inverted the thinking of Marx, because for him it was evident that the international revolutionary process would start in the frame of the national state and that if the socialist proletariat wanted to achieve the revolutionary aims, an exact and profound knowledge of the national territory, its language and its culture was the indispensable condition. One of the characteristics of the new socialist

6. For more details on the attitude of Marx and Engels towards nationalism see Davis, *Nationalism and Socialism*; Davis, *Toward a Marxist Theory of Nationalism*; Gárate, *Karl Marx y los nacionalismos separatistas*; Haupt, Löwy and Weill, *Les Marxistes et la question nationale*; Petrus, 'Marx and Engels on the National Question'; Rosdolsky, *Zur nationalen Frage*; Cummins, *Marx, Engels and National Movements*; Herod, *The Nation in the History of Marxian Thought*.

7. See his article: 'Der Demokratische Panslawismus', *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 14 Febr. 1848, in *Marx/Engels Werke*, Berlin, 1967, 6, p. 165-76.

society would be the fomentation of the pluralistic richness of cultural particularities. There would be no universal socialist society, but an international socialism with 'national faces'.

Neither Lenin nor Stalin reached as far as Otto Bauer had done in their revision of Marxist orthodoxy and its interpretation of the national question. In any case, and that is what should be underlined in this context, the increasing problems of coexistence between the different nationalities integrated in huge multi-ethnic and multicultural political systems, had introduced the national question into the agenda of the socialist worker organisations since the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Even if the majority of the socialist movement and its most relevant leaders, such as Karl Kautsky, remained loyal to Marxist orthodoxy, there was now a discussion taking place and there were some new proposals formulated by some of the socialists most affected by the national question in their own territory.⁸ Nevertheless, as we shall see, none of these proposals reached Spain, where the industrialisation of the Basque coastal provinces had given rise to the birth of a multi-ethnic working class.

The Making of the Basque Working Class

Historically, the Basque coastal provinces of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa had been important centres of the traditional iron industry, which since the end of the eighteenth century became more and more obsolete, because the small ironworks based on charcoal were no longer able to compete with the products offered by the technologically more advanced European industries. During the nineteenth century the frequent military riots in the Basque provinces, first against the French occupier, then during the Carlist wars, produced the definitive collapse of the traditional industry. Only after the end of the last Carlist war in 1876 and in the political frame of the new liberal Restoration Monarchy of the Bourbons, which substituted a long period of military contention by a new era of pseudo-democratic, but relatively stable liberal-conservative parliamentarism, were the preconditions of the socio-economic process of modernisation present. The massive export of Basque iron-ore to the British markets after the 1880s facilitated the accumulation of important capital in the hands of the Basque bourgeoisie and thus, together with the import of

8. Mommsen, *Arbeiterbewegung und nationale Frage*; Wehler, *Sozialdemokratie und Nationalstaat*; Konrad (ed.), *Nationale Frage und Arbeiterbewegung in Mitteleuropa*; Löw, *Der Zerfall der 'Kleinen Internationale'*.

coal from British ports on the way back to Bilbao, created the basis of the new Basque iron and steel industry at the end of the nineteenth century."

The work in the iron-ore mines first, and later in the new factories of the iron industry and the shipyards, greatly exceeded the capacity of the local population to supply the labour needed in the growing industrial belt around Bilbao. Consequently, due to the push-effect of the labour market and the pull-effect of the agrarian crisis, the province of Bizkaia became the centre of big migrational waves that carried thousands and thousands of immigrants to the expanding industrial areas of 'Grand Bilbao'. In only forty years, the population of the province doubled in number from 190,000 in 1877 to 410,000 in 1920. In the same space of time, the capital Bilbao grew from 33,000 inhabitants to 113,000. Even more dramatic was the demographic growth in industrial areas like Barakaldo, Sestao or Abanto/Ciervana.¹⁰

Even if there are only very scarce empirical data concerning the structure of the working class born out of this confluence of industrialisation and migration, most contemporary sources and historiographic studies stress three main elements of that structure. First of all, the new Basque working class was enormously heterogeneous as to its ethnic, linguistic and cultural composition. Especially among the unskilled labour of the mining sector there was a majority of immigrants from outside the Basque Country, mainly from the surrounding agrarian Castilian provinces, but also from the Cantabrian regions of Santander, Asturias and Galicia. Many of them were temporary workers who returned to their geographic origins during the month of harvest with the intention of continuing their jobs in the iron-ore mines once the harvest was over. But not only these temporary workers of Castilia had an agrarian background; even among the local Basque working class of the iron industry and the shipyards there were a lot of workers who initially combined a full-time job in the factory with work on the *baserria*, the typical Basque small agricultural farm normally cultivated as a tenancy. Even if these links between the new industrial and urban habitat on the one hand and

9. González Portilla, *La formación de la sociedad capitalista en el País Vasco*; *ibid.*: 'La industria siderúrgica en el País Vasco'; Flinn, 'British Steel and Spanish Ore'; García Merino, *La formación de una ciudad industrial*.

10. For more detailed information about the sources and the literature on the demographic evolution of the Basque provinces see the chapter 'Die Bevölkerungsentwicklung und die Entstehung der Arbeiterklasse' of Mees, 'Nationalismus und Arbeiterbewegung' (1988), 103–19. See also the recent study of Ruiz Olabuénaga and Blanco, *La inmigración vasca*.

the agrarian background with all its cultural, political and ideological implications on the other never disappeared totally in the local Basque working class, the second big wave of industrialisation in the Basque coastal provinces during the years of Spanish neutrality in the First World War gave an important impulse to the proletarianisation of the local Basque workers more and more definitively integrated in practically all the sectors of the industrial proletariat, even in the unskilled ones.¹¹

The second main feature of the new industrial working class in the Basque Country, at least at the beginning of its formation-process, was the extremely miserable working and living conditions. Among the Basque miners there can be found all the desolate consequences of an uncontrolled and accelerated industrialisation process described by Friedrich Engels in his work on the British case, that is to say, extremely long working days; exploitation of children and women; dirty, unhealthy and overcrowded proletarian ghettos formed by provisional sleeping-barracks near the mines; alcoholism; criminality; contagious epidemics.

The hopelessness of these subhuman working and living conditions that the pioneers of the Basque working class, the miners, had to suffer, as well as its inner heterogeneity and instability, created a special social and political climate, in which a tendency to continuous mobilisation and radical agitation could arise, favoured by a third factor: the lack of organisational tradition. Indeed, not only the Basque industrial working class, but also its organisations – in the first decades after the mid-1880s predominantly socialist-oriented – were absolutely new phenomena. Except for a few marginal groups belonging to the First International, in the Bizkaian industrial areas there were no anarchist, republican or organisational traditions at all. Contrary to what occurred in other European countries, the first socialist labour movement in Bizkaia was not a movement of skilled workers with a craft background, but that of unskilled, mostly illiterate rural workers from different regions who had nothing to lose. In this context of instability, conflict and mobilisation the miners of Bizkaia were the protagonists of a 'war without limits' against the representatives of the miner-bourgeoisie who were unwilling either to recognise the worker organisations or to negotiate with them. On several occasions, such as the major strikes of 1890, 1903 or 1910, the intervention of the military governor was necessary to move the

11. A similar process of proletarianisation during the First World War occurred in other European countries as well. See the different articles in Geary (ed.), *Labour and Socialist Movements in Europe*. For more details on the Basque case see Castells, *Trabajadores*.

employers from their extremely uncompromising attitude in order to find a solution to the conflict. The growing influence of the more skilled workers in the steel and metal industry and the parallel decline of the conflictual mining sector, the consolidation of the socialist organisations and the cohesive effects of the new working class identity established among the individuals of the second worker-generation, geographically now fully integrated in the Basque Country, as well as the strategic openness of the bourgeoisie to negotiations with the socialist organisations – all these were reasons that explain the evolution of Basque socialism from radical unrest to moderate pragmatism from the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century. This specific Basque *revisionism* led in the political area to a substitution of the traditional anti-republican 'guesdism' by precisely the contrary position, that is to say, the defence of collaboration and even electoral coalitions with the republican parties, despite their *bourgeois* character. The new Basque *liberal* socialism was represented by the charismatic leader Indalecio Prieto, who in 1915/16 succeeded in outrunning his radical rival and later co-founder of the Communist Party, the socialist veteran Facundo Perezagua.¹²

In the second industrialising Basque province, Gipuzkoa, there was no need for any revisionism, since its weaker socialist movement had always been more moderate than that of Bizkaia, which can be explained by the specific characteristics of the socio-economic process of modernisation in Gipuzkoa. Here, industrialisation started later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, and its further evolution was not as uneven and fast as in Bizkaia. There was no industrial centre like Bilbao and industry was much more diversified in terms of products (textile, paper, metal) and location, in lots of small or middle-scale industrial areas. Even though there was immigration, its dimension never reached that of the Bizkaian case. The pioneers of the socialist organisations, the skilled workers of the arms industry in Eibar, with a long organisational tradition in the craft corporations, fitted much better in the frame of the first European labour movements than their comrades of Bizkaia. A typical feature of the socialists from Gipuzkoa, especially those of Eibar, was not only their moderate strategy, but also their stronger relation with the Basque cultural tradition. The memoirs of the historical socialist leader from Eibar, Toribio Echevarria, give us a good overview of the autochthonous socialism in the metropolis of the arms industry, where it was normal to find socialist

12. Fusi, *Política obrera en el País Vasco*; Olábarri Gortázar, *Relaciones laborales en Vizcaya*; Miralles, *El socialismo vasco durante la II República*; Eguiguren, *El PSOE en el País Vasco*; Sanfeliciano, *UGT de Vizcaya*; Castells, *Trabajadores*.

workers talking or organising political meetings in the Basque language, listening to the traditional Basque flute-music or to the popular verse-improvisers (*Bertsolariak*), attending the pelota-games or even frequenting Catholic mass.¹³

Summing up these brief observations concerning the Basque working class, its genesis and further development, we should above all underline its extreme heterogeneity in several important aspects like territorial recruitment, cultural traditions, working-class identity, and political or ideological strategies. The development of industrial production, instead of leading to the creation of a labour force increasingly monolithic in its interests and identity, reproduced in the new frame of the capitalist class society previous patterns of identity that did not necessarily have to be opposed to class-consciousness, but could go hand in hand with it.¹⁴ The rise of Basque political nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century at nearly the same time and in the same places where socialism was growing up and becoming strong undoubtedly contributed to accentuating the latent frictions between the different sectors of the Basque working class. But it was at the same time also the reaction not only of a petty bourgeoisie displaced by the radical consequences of the process of socio-economic modernisation, but an answer given by important segments of the Basque workers to the 'naive cosmopolitanism'¹⁵ of the Basque mainstream socialism.

The Rise of Basque Nationalism

In historical perspective, the rise and the success of Basque nationalism were the consequence of the large gap between the process of *state-building* and that of *nation-building* in Spain.¹⁶ Started by the Catholic

13. Echevarria, *Viaje por el país de los recuerdos*.

14. Geary, 'Working-class Identities in Europe', 204–15. The most recent research on the problem of the overlapping of different patterns of identity in the working class is that of Kulczycki on the Polish workers in Germany. See Kulczycki, *The Foreign Worker and the German Labor Movement* and id., *The Polish Coal Miners' Union*.

15. Bauer, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*, 304. For more information about the industrialisation of Gipuzkoa, its working class and its labour movement see Gárate, *El proceso de desarrollo económico en Guipúzcoa*; Castells, *Modernización y dinámica política en la sociedad guipuzcoana*, 9–159; id., *Trabajadores*, 1–140; Luengo Teixidor, *Crecimiento económico y cambio social*.

16. See the classical analysis of Linz, 'Early State-Building'. An interesting recent analysis is that of Nuñez Seixas, 'Questione nazionale e crisi statale'. For a comparative view see also Puhle, 'Nation States, Nations and Nationalisms in Western and Southern Europe'; id., *Staaten, Nationen und Regionen in Europa*.

kings Isabela and Fernando in the fifteenth century and completed by the definite integration of the Basque provinces after the end of the last Carlist War in 1876, the Spanish nation-state is normally considered as one of the historical nation-states in Europe. Even recently the policy of territorial, religious and cultural unification carried on after the marriage of Isabela and Fernando in 1469 and based on such powerful instruments as the Reconquista, the radical repression of the important Jewish and Muslim sectors of the population, and the Inquisition – under direct control of the monarchs – has been described as a successful example of the 'genesis of a modern administrative state'.¹⁷ Nevertheless it was a weak nation-state that after the independence of most of the American colonies at the beginning of the nineteenth century and due to the continuous warfare on Spanish territory during the following decades fell into a deep chronic financial crisis, which would be a serious handicap for the liberal governments. With a bourgeoisie located in the Catalan and Basque periphery and political power in the hands of the traditional aristocratic elites, who controlled life in the provinces by a broad net of clientelism, the central state lacked the public legitimation necessary for the integration of all the Spanish territories and their people into the frame of the state. Thus it is no wonder that Spanish nationalism during the nineteenth century remained weak and never became a movement.¹⁸ If we add the fact that two other vehicles that turned out to be fundamental for the work of integration in other European states in nineteenth-century Spain did not work at all, the problems of Spanish nation-building become evident. We are referring to public education, which in the bankrupt Spanish state was not much more than a programme, the reality being an educational sector dominated by the Catholic Church, which was not exactly the most appropriate instrument for the promotion of liberal principles and loyalty to the state.¹⁹ The same thing can be said of military service. The creation of a national army guided by the principle of the soldier being nothing else than an *armed citizen* – since the French Revolution a sacred ideal of European liberalism – in Spain was only valid for the members of the lower classes unable to pay the sum necessary to exempt oneself from military service. It was not until the presidency

17. Schulze, *Staat und Nation in der europäischen Geschichte*, especially 54–7.

18. For further information on this still quite unknown subject see Nuñez Seixas, *Historiographical Approaches to Nationalism in Spain*, 138–50.

19. The opposite occurred in Germany and in France. See Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 396; Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte*, 532; Schulze, *Staat und Nation*, 244.

of Canalejas in 1912 that the government started to take steps to abolish this discriminatory practice.²⁰

In this context the longevity of the local and regional particularisms and their successful resistance against complete absorption by the state is understandable. The Basque provinces succeeded in maintaining up to the second half of the nineteenth century their traditional *Fueros*, that is, an extensive faculty of political and financial self-government. The *Fueros* guaranteed the political influence of the traditional agrarian Basque elites, whereas the representatives of the emergent commercial and industrial bourgeoisie protested against their under-representation in the regional parliaments and the duty-free import of all kinds of European products due to the customs being located on the frontier with Castilia and not on the coast. Consequently, Basque liberals demanded a reform of the old *Fueros* in order to adapt them to the circumstances of the modernising Basque society. After the liberal victory in the Carlist Wars,²¹ however, the new conservative government of Cánovas del Castillo abolished them totally. This radical abolition was answered by the creation of a broad popular movement, the *Fuerismo*, with the aim of protesting against this political deprivation and demanding the restoration of the *Fueros*. Following the scheme of Miroslav Hroch,²² this movement can be considered as 'phase A' of the 'national awakening' in the Basque Country, even if the movement was not only the creation of a few intellectuals interested in the history and culture of their nation. The *Fuerismo* was at the same time both a political movement with a concrete programme and a (rare) participation in several elections and a cultural 'renaissance'. The receptors of its message were not only the urban intellectuals, but also broad sectors of the illiterate rural population, which by means of the 'oral literature' of the popular verse-improvisors, the *Bertsolariak*, were confronted with the themes of the *Fuerismo*, when

20. A brief, also bibliographical overview on the problems of the Spanish state- and nation-building can be found in Mees, 'Das Baskische Labyrinth', especially pp. 35–8. A very interesting comparative view is offered by Vilar, 'Estado, nación, patria en España y en Francia 1870–1914'. For the broader European context see Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Modern Europe*; Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*. A brief overview of some of the main problems of the process of state-formation is found in Axtmann, 'The Formation of the Modern State: The Debate in the Social Sciences'.

21. The three Carlist Wars took place between 1833 and 1839/40, 1846 and 1849, and between 1872 and 1876. Carlism was the social, political and military representation of the Ancien Régime opposed to liberalism.

22. Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*. For more details concerning the application of the model of Hroch to the Basque case see Mees, 'Europako Herri Txikien Etnatzea'.

the *Bertsolariak* deplored the loss of the *Fueros*, the decay of the Basque language, *Euskera*, or the interference of non-Basque, foreign customs and behaviour.²³

This broad proto-nationalist movement, whose ideas were shared by the rest of the militarily defeated Carlists, even though it was still strong in the Basque provinces, created a political and social atmosphere hostile to the central government, in which nationalism would emerge. When from the 1880s Bizkaian society was turned upside-down by the rapid and radical industrialisation, the public space for relatively moderate ideologies like those of *Fuerismo* or even *Carlismo* became increasingly narrow, which opened the doors to radical thinking and movements like nationalism or socialism. In fact, Sabino Arana, the founder of the Basque Nationalist Party, did little more than draw radical conclusions from the *Fuerist* and *Carlist* programmes, interpreting Basque history in terms not of autonomy, but of absolute independence from the Spanish state. In his discourse he mixed up well-known elements from the *Carlist* tradition, such as extreme Catholicism, agrarian romanticism or the moralising rejection of all 'exotic' and 'anti-Basque' ingredients of the new, modern world like industry, capitalism and secularisation, together with other ideas borrowed from traditional social Catholicism (harmony of classes; anti-socialism with – in the case of Arana – racism against immigrant workers). But Arana even shared some issues with socialist or republican politicians, such as the call for the crusade against clientelist anti-democratic power-structures, briefly, against what Joaquín Costa, one of the most brilliant ideologists of liberal Spanish *regenerationism*, would denounce as *Caciquismo*, this traditional Spanish type of power-control channeled through a broad network of hierarchic clientelistic relations, at nearly the same time as Sabino Arana did.²⁴ The solution of all the problems and the way to never-ending happiness for the Basques, in the eyes of Sabino Arana, led through the reaffirmation of their own history, culture and race, the consequent expulsion of everything considered external to

23. On Carlism, *Fueros*, *Fuerismo* and the integration of the Basque provinces into the Spanish state see Oyarzun, *Historia del carlismo*; Clemente, *Historia General del Carlismo*; Coverdale, *The Basque Phase of Spain's First Carlist War*; Extramiana, *Historia de las Guerras Carlistas*; Fernández de Pinedo, *Crecimiento económico y transformaciones sociales del País Vasco*, esp. 457–78; Garmendia, *La ideología carlista*; Mina, *Fueros y revolución liberal en Navarra*; Otazu y Llana, *El 'Igualitarismo Vasco'*; Portillo, *Los poderes locales en la formación del régimen foral*; Agirreazkuenaga, 'The Abolition of the Representative Assemblies in the Basque Provinces during the Rise of the Liberal Revolution'; Elorza, *Ideologías del nacionalismo vasco*, 11–107; Fernández Sebastián, *La génesis del fuerismo*.

24. Costa, *Oligarquía y caciquismo como la forma actual*.

that tradition and the recovery of their old independence by the restoration of the *Fueros*. This attractive millenaristic message was imbedded in the daily work of creating a nationalist history with deep mythological implications, as well as nationalist symbols like the flag, the hymn or the national festivities, combined with a purification of the Basque language by means of the elimination of all Romance influence and the invention of neologisms supposed to be totally Basque in their origins like the word *Euzkadi* for the Basque territory.²⁵

The first members and voters of the Basque Nationalist Party, created in the mid-1890s as a semi-illegal group acting in public when possible and underground when the repression became stronger, belonged to the urban petty bourgeoisie of Bilbao. This middle-class nationalism was a radical answer to the radical transformation of daily life caused by the socio-economic process of modernisation and its anxious consequences such as mass immigration, criminality, strikes and riots. Nevertheless, during the lifetime of Sabino Arana, other social sectors of Basque society joined the nationalist movement. For those native industrialists and managers opposed to the few families of the high bourgeoisie that controlled the biggest part of Basque industry and the banking system, as well as political life as leaders of the *notable* monarchist parties, the nationalist movement became an important instrument or pressure-group both in Basque and in Spanish political and economic life. The peasants and the fishermen used it to express their protest against *Caciquismo* on the one hand and the social costs of modernisation of the fishing industry on the other. To the industrial workers nationalism was helpful in the process of constructing a new identity.²⁶

However, it was not always and probably not even mainly purely rational self-interest that motivated Basque people to join the nationalists. As important as or even more important than calculated interest was the attractive image of Basque nationalism as a movement and as a community that claimed the total integration of the individual, and not only his vote in the elections as did the traditional political parties. Sabino Arana and his followers succeeded in building up a modern democratic popular party, which was just the core of a broad politico-cultural network

25. Payne, *Basque Nationalism from its Origins to ETA*; Corcuera, *Orígenes*; Larronde, *El nacionalismo vasco*; Solozábal Echevarria, *El primer nacionalismo vasco*; Jemein y Lambarri, *Biografía de Arana Goiri 'Iur Sabin*. The most important primary sources are Arana Goiri, *Obras Completas*; Elizondo, *Sabino Arana*; Corcuera and Oribe, *Historia del nacionalismo vasco en sus documentos*.

26. Mees, *Entre nación y clase*; de Pablo, 'Las bases sociales del nacionalismo vasco en Alava'; Jáuregui, 'Bases sociales del nacionalismo vasco'.

of organisations, associations and initiatives of all kinds directed at different groups of the population like youth or women and offering a rich variety of activities, such as courses on traditional Basque dance, music, Basque language, mountaineering, football, pelota and so on. In order to stress even more the difference between the PNV and the other traditional political parties, from 1913 onwards, in the official denomination of the PNV the word 'party' was eliminated and replaced by that of 'Community' (*Comunidad Nacionalista Vasca*, CNV).²⁷

Basque nationalism as a huge interclassist social movement soon became one of the most powerful political and social forces in the province of Bizkaia, with a remarkable influence in Gipuzkoa also, whereas the two rural Basque provinces of Alava and Navarra continued to be dominated by the traditional elites.²⁸ Following the model of Hroch, the definitive step from 'Phase B' of political agitation to 'Phase C' of a mass movement was taken during the years of the First World War, when in 1917 Basque nationalists for the first time obtained a majority in the provincial elections of Bizkaia and so the possibility to form the first provincial nationalist government. The success continued some months later when in Bizkaia all of the deputies elected to the national Spanish parliament except one belonged to the Nationalist Party, which outside Bizkaia obtained another two deputies as well, one in Gipuzkoa and the other one in Navarra.²⁹

The new nationalist votes came both from sectors of the upper classes and from the local industrial workers, among whom the doctrine of Sabino Arana was more and more popular. This spectacular advance of nationalism among the working class made the traditionally tense relationship between socialism and nationalism in the Basque Country even more conflictual.

Socialism and the National Question

As we mentioned earlier, socialism and nationalism in the Basque Country were two movements that from the start emerged and grew up at almost

27. A broad analysis of the construction of the nationalist community can be found in Mees, *Nacionalismo*. As to the nationalist women's organisation see the excellent work of Ugalde, *Mujeres y nacionalismo vasco* and the historical testimony of Bursain, 'Emakume'. The only monograph published on the nationalist youth organisation *Juventud Vasca* is the more descriptive than analytical book of Camino and Guezala, *Juventud y nacionalismo vasco*.

28. Mees and de Pablo, 'Historia social del nacionalismo vasco'.

29. Mees, 'Zwischen Euphorie und Depression'.

the same time, their relation from the beginning being an extremely tense and contentious one. Since the *raison d'être* of the nationalists was to recover their lost freedom and the traditional national Basque identity, if it was necessary to expel every foreign intruder who corrupted and perverted the Basque traditions, customs and habits, and if they considered socialism to be the most dangerous intruder in Basque reality, then the attitude of the socialists towards Basque nationalism was quite pre-determined. Even though both movements stood in clear opposition to the political system of the Restoration monarchy (1876–1923), the gap between them was as large or even larger than the one that separated each movement from the state.

As to the attitude of the Basque socialists, the confrontation with political (and later trade union) nationalism went far beyond the normal, daily struggle between two political parties, because the followers of the two major leaders of Basque socialism, the radical Facundo Perezagua and his moderate successor Indalecio Prieto, never really made any effort to differentiate between nationalism and the national question, that is to say, between a particular way of making politics and the evident existence of a general problem. Neither the increasing electoral success of the Nationalist Party, nor the growing popularity of the nationalist trade union ELA would move the socialists from their position of doctrinal immobilism, in which anti-nationalism stood in obvious proximity to anti-Basquism, defined as an attitude that rejected any kind of cultural particularism as anachronistic and reactionary, and even to Spanish nationalism. Several reasons help us to explain this attitude.

First of all, the case of Basque socialism is no exception in the history of the international socialist labour movement. As we have seen above, since the writings of Marx and Engels, the ideological praxis of the Second International was marked by the radical rejection of all national and nationalist issues as anti-proletarian and as a reactionary ideological weapon of the bourgeoisie in the class struggle. In the cause of the development of the productive forces and definitively after the proletarian victory in the socialist revolution, nationalism and with it any kind of national differentiation was condemned to disappear in the frame of the new socialist and internationalist world order. The only kind of nationalism that could be accepted by the socialists was that of the developed major states, because in those cases the establishing of national political, economic and commercial unity would give an important impulse to the development of productive forces, emphasising the class-contradictions and – in the long term – accelerating the outbreak of the socialist revolution. In this ideological context, the colonialist or

imperialist incorporation of the small 'nations without history' into the broader political and economic framework of the developed dominant nation-states was nothing other than the logical consequence of the evolution of history.

In the discourse of the Basque socialists we find practically all these arguments of classic orthodox Marxism. It was Tomás de Meabe, a former personal friend of Sabino Arana and later founder of the socialist youth organisation, the *Juventudes Socialistas*, who, after having converted from nationalism to socialism at the end of the nineteenth century, defined the ideological position of Basque socialism towards nationalism. In his polemic with his former friend and now political enemy Sabino Arana, Meabe focused his arguments on the two classic ideas of Marxist thought. Firstly, in the eyes of Meabe, Basque nationalism with its pretension to re-establish the political status quo ante, that is to say the situation of traditional Basque self-determination before the abolition of the *Fueros* in 1839 and 1876, would lead to the substitution of the frontiers of the modern nation-state created in 1876 by those of multiple small and independent republics like the Basque one, a process which he considered reactionary and historically anachronistic: 'Pretending to move back at one stroke to the minuscule medieval nations, when the uncoercible evolution of the economic laws is pushing us beyond the current frontiers'.³⁰

The second argument is no less classical and refers to the bourgeois character of nationalism and the conviction of its disappearance during the process of proletarianisation of modern society: 'As Vizcaya is proletarianising all the time, nationalism will become very soon an ideal for the private use of four pure-blooded rich guys'.³¹ The inherent logic of history was the formation of huge political unions and the absorption of all national and regional particularisms on the way to the world-wide socialist society. There was no place for either political or cultural dissidents, as a few years later Miguel de Unamuno, the famous Basque philosopher and in those years ideologically close to the socialist project, pointed out in his polemic public speech in Bilbao, referring to the future of the Basque language: 'That language you speak, Basque people, that Euskera will vanish together with you; it doesn't matter because it must

30. Basque nationalism means 'pretender retroceder de un golpe a las minúsculas naciones medievales, cuando la evolución incoercible de las leyes económicas nos empuja más allá de las actuales fronteras'. See the article of Meabe in *La Lucha de Clases*, 3 Sept. 1898.

31. 'Como Vizcaya se proletariza por momentos, el nacionalismo llegará a ser muy pronto un ideal para uso de bolsillo de cuatro adinerados'. See the article of Tomás de Meabe in *La Lucha de Clases*, 11 April 1903.

vanish like you must; hasten to kill and to bury it with honour and speak in Spanish.³²

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Basque mainstream socialism did not change its attitude towards the national question, nor did it discuss any of the proposals made by the Austro-Marxists.³³ Both leaders, at first Perezagua and then Prieto, and together with them nearly all the leading socialist members in the Basque Country were pragmatic politicians, not given to theoretical discussions. Nevertheless, precisely because of this pragmatic realism, Indalecio Prieto led the socialist movement towards a more flexible position on the national question until the Basque socialists adopted the policy of some kind of regional autonomy as a means of decentralisation and democratisation. The result of this tactical rather than ideological, slow evolution of the Basque socialists was the Basque Autonomy Statute of October 1936, voted by the parliament of the leftist Popular Front after the beginning of the Civil War. The late constitution of the Basque Regional Autonomy was quite characteristic of the extremely tense relationship between Spanish and Basque socialism on the one hand and Basque nationalism on the other. It was finally reached after a clear turn to centre-left political positions committed by the Basque nationalists during the last years of the Republic due to their increasing confrontation with the centralist parties of the right, which were unwilling to meet the demands of regional autonomy.³⁴

In fact, it was not only the frame of the topical anti-national discourse of European socialism that predetermined the attitude of Basque socialists, but also its traditional hard and polemical confrontation with nationalism. The rapidity and abruptness of the socio-economic process of modernisation had radicalised Basque society and there was not too much space for intermediary political programmes acting as links between the opposite poles of the 'two communities', the nationalist and the anti-nationalist.³⁵

32. 'Esa lengua que hablas, pueblo vasco, ese euskera desaparece contigo; no importa porque como tú debe desaparecer; apresúrate a darle muerte con honra y habla en español'. This speech has been published in Unamuno, *Obras Completas*, 237–48.

33. Fusi, 'El PSOE y el problema vasco'; id., *El País Vasco* (see especially pp. 43–60: 'Movimiento obrero y nacionalismo vasco 1890–1936').

34. Granja, *Nacionalismo y II República en el País Vasco*; id., *República y Guerra Civil en Euskadi*; Rodríguez del Coro, *Nacionalismo vasco y Frente Popular*; Garitaonandia and Granja, *La Guerra Civil en el País Vasco*; Fusi, *El problema vasco en la II República*; Castells, *El Estatuto Vasco*.

35. Escudero, *Euskadi*. This application of the concepts of F. Tönnies is not completely precise because of the heterogeneity of the anti-nationalist community that includes political, social and cultural traditions very different from each other, like socialism, republicanism, Carlism, anarchism or Restoration monarchism.

The conservatism, clericalism and radical anti-socialism with clear racist ingredients of orthodox Basque nationalism was an insurmountable barrier for any socialist and also for that tiny minority of socialists from Eibar, who during the first campaign for regional autonomy in 1917/18 tried to formulate the project of a leftist, autonomous Basquism based on a recognition of Basque national particularism.³⁶ But neither this socialist Basquism nor the attempt of some Basque nationalist dissidents between 1910 and 1913 to create a non-confessional republican nationalist party were successful.³⁷ In the Basque Country, until the foundation of the *Acción Nacionalista Vasca* (ANV) at the beginning of the Second Republic,³⁸ and contrary to the situation in Catalonia,³⁹ national particularism was monopolised by one single party,⁴⁰ and all the intentions to build bridges between the opposing blocs failed. It was precisely this supposed incompatibility between Basque nationalism and socialist worker-organisations that led Sabino Arana and his followers to propose the isolation of the native workers from socialism and the foundation of an independent nationalist trade union.

The Worker Does Have a Fatherland: The Trade Union ELA-SOV and its Nationalist Alternative

The history of the Basque nationalist labour movement began much earlier than 1911, when the trade union *Eusko Langileen Alkartasuna-Solidaridad de Obreros Vascos* was finally founded. In 1897, two years after the creation of the Nationalist Party, Sabino Arana himself published a polemical article in which he invited the Basque workers to organise themselves in order to fight against both the 'despotic bourgeois oppression' and the 'still more disgusting domination' exercised by the immigrants, contemptuously called *maketos* by Arana. This proposal was a direct result of the organisational success and increasing presence of the socialists in

36. For more details see Mees, *Nacionalismo*, 252–60.

37. Mees, 'La Izquierda Imposible'.

38. The best study on ANV is that of Granja, *Nacionalismo y II República en el País Vasco*.

39. Nagel, *Arbeitschaft und nationale Frage in Katalonien*; Brunn, 'Die Organisation der katalanischen Bewegung'.

40. The differences between the two nationalist parties existing since the splitting of the *Comunión Nacionalista* in 1921 were more tactical and propagandistic than ideological and real. In fact, the old CNV and the new refounded PNV reached a quick consensus to reunite both parties in 1930 after the end of the military dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. For details see Mees, *Nacionalismo*, 308–38.

Basque society, which in the eyes of Sabino Arana was due not only to the wave of non-Basque immigration,⁴¹ but also to the self-centred attitude of the Basque bourgeoisie, which had called and hired the immigrants only because they were cheaper than local workers.

Nevertheless, the concern about the social problems of the workers was only a marginal part in the programme and political practice of Sabino Arana. Consequently it took several years to carry on with Arana's proposal to create a nationalist trade union, which finally happened in 1911 after a new violent miners' strike took place, partly because the success of political nationalism among the local workers increased continuously and partly due to the decline of the traditional Catholic mixed trade unions, which were considered more and more as instruments of the employers.⁴²

What was the social profile of this new nationalist trade union? Recent research has pointed out some interesting parallels between the social status of the first nationalist trade unionists and that of other early European trade unions, since in the Basque case the first trade unionists were also predominantly qualified workers with a craft background, now employed in the industrial sectors of the construction, iron or steel industry from the industrial belt around Bilbao. On the contrary, the mining sector with a very high proportion of unskilled immigrant labour and the sector of the dock-workers in the port of Bilbao, under the control of worker organisations manipulated as strike-breakers by the employers, were the industrial sectors with the weakest influence of the ELA trade union. As

41. It is extremely difficult to check the proportion of native Basques and that of non-Basque immigrants in the socialist movement in the Basque Country. In the archives there are with very few exceptions no lists of party or trade union members. From the biographies and the surnames of some leaders we know of their Basque origins, but on the other hand there are plenty of contemporary documents that mention or describe the important influence of the immigrants in the socialist organisation, which is confirmed as well by the list of the members of the Socialist Party in Bilbao dated 1915: in that year, about 75 per cent of all official party members were immigrants from outside, which, on the other hand, corresponded more or less with the calculated proportion of immigrants in the total population of the capital of Bizkaia. For more details see Mees, 'Nationalismus und Arbeiterbewegung', 134–7.

42. For the history of ELA see Mees, *Nacionalismo*, 139–184; id. (1988), 'Nationalismus und Arbeiterbewegung im spanischen Baskenland'; id., 'Arbeiter oder Patrioten?'; Olábarri Gortázar, *Relaciones laborales*, 131–66; Otaegui, 'Organización obrera y nacionalismo', 7–83. A critical overview on the literature concerning the history of ELA with plenty of bibliographical references can be found in Mees, 'Nationalismus und Arbeiterbewegung im spanischen Baskenland' (1996).

in the worker organisations of many other European countries, the Basque ELA also passed through a process of proletarianisation during the industrial boom of the First World War. The new members of the union were young and often also unskilled workers residing in the huge proletarian conurbations near the big industrial factories in Bilbao and its surroundings. The scarce data concerning the evolution of membership indicate a slow growth of ELA until 1914/15, a remarkable acceleration of growth during 1916–19, and a slowdown of the still continuous growth thereafter. In 1923, on the eve of the military dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923–30), ELA had nearly reached the same number of members as the socialist UGT, which from 1921 to 1923 had been struck by a major crisis, having lost thousands of members during those years. Henceforth, there was a certain similarity between both trade unions not only as to the numbers of their members, but also with regard to their social profile, with the sole exception of the mining sector with a strong UGT and a weak ELA. The non-Basque immigrant workers were practically excluded from the nationalist trade union, since the statutes of ELA required any future member to prove that at least one of his four surnames was etymologically of Basque origin.

This discriminatory racist requirement shows us the ideological proximity between trade union and party, because the inventor of this clause had been Sabino Arana, who had applied it years earlier to the first cells of the PNV at the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, during the first years of the existence of ELA, its relationship with the Nationalist Party used to be very close. The foundation of the union had been prepared by the members of the Commission of Social Action of the PNV, even if ELA was born in 1911 as a formally independent organisation with no organic links with the party. However, the informal and ideological links were evident. At least during the first years, there were no proper ideologists or charismatic leaders in the union, and the nationalist daily newspaper *Euzkadi*, especially the articles of its director Engracio de Aranzadi ('Kizkitza') and those published in the daily column on social problems, served as a medium for the propagation of ideological and political directives among the nationalist workers. Furthermore, in many towns party and union shared the same localities for their activities. The ideological transmission between party and union was also guaranteed by the enormous influence of nationalist Catholic priests supplying organisational and ideological support in both organisations. Consequently, if we describe the four major ideological concepts of the PNV as anti-socialism, Basquism, Catholicism and social harmony, the same items would serve for the nationalist trade union too.

This extreme ideological subordination of ELA, however, did not last too long. During the contentious years of the post-war economic recession up to the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, the increasing confrontation between nationalist workers and nationalist employers strengthened the class-consciousness of the ELA members. In the files of the *Solidarios* and on the pages of their journal *Eusko Langilea-El Obrero Vasco* new and unorthodox voices could be heard, questioning the discriminatory surname requirement, proposing a general revision of the capitalist structures of property, criticising the materialist egoism of the nationalist bourgeoisie or discussing the convenience of founding a nationalist worker-party. Even if this critical wing of the nationalist trade union was formed by a clear minority of the union members, the fact that it was able to articulate its criticisms symbolises a growing emancipation of the unionists from the party and the will to build up an independent trade union in the service of the class interest.

This trend towards emancipation and partial radicalisation was also evident in the daily praxis of the ELA union. During the first years of its existence, ELA resembled not a trade union, but a friendly society. It organised different insurance policies among its members to protect them and their families in cases of illness, death, accidents or unemployment. The relatively good functioning of these social services was one of the most popular incentives for a Basque worker to affiliate to ELA, since membership of the nationalist trade union was the only way to compensate for the deficits and the delay in the construction of the Spanish welfare state, whose preferred victims were of course the different social layers of the lower classes.⁴³

But besides these important social services there remained enough space for other, more typical trade union activities such as negotiations on wages or working conditions combined with strikes. An analysis of the participation of ELA in the different strikes organised during the years of the Restoration monarchy offers two main conclusions.⁴⁴ Firstly, a clear tendency can be observed of an increasing willingness to participate in the worker-mobilisations that went hand in hand with ideological radicalisation and emancipation from the party. The value of this thesis,

43. For the genesis and historical evolution of the welfare state in international perspective see Ritter, *Der Sozialstaat*; Baldwin, *The Politics of Social Solidarity*; Albers, *Vom Armenhaus zum Wohlfahrtsstaat*; Rimlinger, *Welfare Policy and Industrialization*; Ashford, *The Emergence of the Welfare States*; Ashford and Kelley (eds), *Nationalizing Social Security in Europe and America*.

44. The research on the evolution of ELA during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, the Second Republic and the Francoist period is still to be done.

however, is only relative, since ELA never worked as a centralised organisation, maintaining to an important extent the autonomy of the local, regional or sectoral branches of the trade union. Therefore it is quite difficult to define the general patterns of the collective behaviour of the *Solidarios*, because totally contradictory activities might occur at the same time. This was the case for instance during the years of the post-war recession, when the ELA branch of the construction sector in Bilbao became one of the most radical and mobilised trade unions of the capital, whereas the local group of the *Solidarios* working at the ELA bastion, the big 'Euskalduna' shipyard, continued a policy of obedient submission to the owner of the factory, the nationalist Ramón de la Sota y Llano, paying this price for relatively good working conditions and preferential treatment of the organisation itself by a management willing to repress any kind of non-conformist behaviour among the workers.

The second conclusion refers to the enormous importance of political and ideological conflicts as determinant factors in the praxis of the nationalist trade union. This becomes especially evident in the relationship between ELA and the other trade unions. In this context it is very significant that in almost all of the strikes organised or supported by ELA other Catholic worker-organisations also participated. Unlike the socialist UGT, the Free Catholic Unions (*Sindicatos Católicos Libres*) were not directly linked to any political party, even if their conservatism and anti-Basque nationalism put them in an ideological proximity to the rightist monarchist parties.⁴⁵ In spite of this 'Spanish centralism', which the ELA denounced in more than one occasion, this polemic seems not to have been a major obstacle for the collaboration between ELA and the Free Catholic Unions.

On the other hand, the tense relationship between political nationalism and socialism was a serious obstacle for co-operation between ELA and UGT in the factories. With very few exceptions there were no common strikes held by both organisations. The climax of this polemical relationship was reached after the great Revolutionary General Strike in August 1917 organised by the UGT and the anarcho-syndicalist CNT against the government. ELA, as in all the strikes led by the UGT, had argued also on this occasion that the political character of the strike was the main reason for rejecting it. The violent riots caused by striking workers and military forces provoked a sharp reaction of the nationalist and the rightist press against the socialists, considered to be the 'destroyers of social peace'. This propaganda produced such a deep impression in the ranks of the *Solidarios* that during the next two years they did not take

45. On this movement see Winston, *Workers and the Right in Spain*, 96-7 and *passim*.

part in any strike. After 1919, in the course of the process of radicalisation and emancipation, ELA reaffirmed its willingness to participate actively in the mobilisation of the workers, but now the barriers came from the side of the other trade unions and the big employers of Bizkaia. The latter had substituted their strategy of open confrontation with the leftist trade unions with the more profitable one of negotiation and compromise, which the UGT and CNT exploited for a closed-shop policy against ELA and the other Catholic organisations, forcing the workers of the great factories with the consent of the employers to affiliate to one of them, the socialist or anarcho-syndicalist union. These strange circumstances explain the fact that during the strikes against the 20 per cent wage-cut in 1922 ELA maintained to the end an attitude of radical refusal of any wage-reduction, whereas after the negotiations the normally more radical UGT agreed with the employers' proposal of a reduction of 8 per cent. That was another example of the extremely tense relationship between workers' socialism and nationalism even in a period of increasing disposition to mobilisation of the latter. The obstacle was the political conflict and not the greater or lesser radicalism of the other organisation. It was precisely the absence of this political conflict that permitted the *Solidarios* to organise together with the anarcho-syndicalist CNT their only political strike before 1923, the strike against the governor of Bizkaia in 1922. Such a strike pursued hand in hand by nationalist *Solidarios* and socialist workers was completely unthinkable.

In fact, the ELA members moved in a complicated network of social, religious and national identification, in which the Nationalist Party played an important part. As we have seen, the foundation, ideology and part of the organisational structure of ELA were closely linked to the PNV. In fact, the *Solidarios* of the first years felt more like nationalists than workers: there was no special nationalist working-class culture and their festivities did not differ from those of the Nationalist Party.

Nevertheless, this situation changed in the course of the consolidation and emancipation of ELA from 1918/19 onwards. Even if there was never a real danger of breaking with the party, in years of social and economic crisis the disputes between both organisations increased in number and tension, because the traditional nationalist dogma of the party's 'social neutrality', based on the conviction of nationalism being the home of all Basques whatever their social status might be, was not very convincing for a nationalist worker suffering the effects of the crisis. Consequently, on the pages of *El Obrero Vasco* quite uncommon criticisms were articulated, denouncing the official attitude of 'social neutrality' defended by the leaders of the party as clear and badly disguised support for the Basque

bourgeoisie. For the same reason, the daily paper *Euzkadi* was criticised as a paper with a 'bourgeois essence'. Another *Solidario* went even further, discussing the merits of the foundation of a nationalist worker-party.⁴⁶

Since these critical voices received an important backing from the nationalist youth organisation, the party-leaders tried to deactivate the criticisms by calling a single issue national party-assembly with the sole aim of fixing the official party policy towards the social problems. When the delegates of that assembly met in May 1920, however, the internal conflict on the national question had already exploded, separating the party members into radical separatists and moderate autonomists. In those circumstances no serious discussion on the socio-economic programme was possible, so that the debate was postponed until the celebration of the next party-assembly called for that purpose. This assembly never took place, because in 1921 the party split in two. Most of the union's leaders, like its co-founder Manu Robles-Arangiz, favoured the new PNV, which all contemporary sources describe as 'more popular' than the 'bourgeois' *Comunión Nacionalista*. But with the election of the former *Comunión*-leader Luis Arana, the brother of Sabino, expelled from the *Comunión* in 1916 for his authoritarian and egocentric style of directing the party, as new president of the PNV, it soon became evident that the new party would also continue with the same conservative policy of 'social neutrality' practised by the *Comunión*. Then, two years later, the beginning of the dictatorship of Primo put an end to the political activities of the Basque nationalists. Once democracy was restored after the proclamation of the Second Republic, the nationalists' first aim was the reunification and consolidation of the party, and then later obtaining regional autonomy. In other words, up to the years of post-Francoism, Basque nationalism had not been able or willing to define its socio-economic programme. This experience of disappointment with both nationalist parties strengthened the search for independence of the nationalist trade unionists, which gradually built up its own nationalist working-class culture and conscience, different from the nationalist one. One of the indicators of this evolution was the incorporation of symbols previously considered as socialist and therefore rejected, like the celebration of 1 May as the official day of the working class.

This maturing of ELA, i.e. its transformation from a simple and obedient appendix of the party to a modern and autonomous class-organisation, suffered a certain paralysis during the years of the Primo dictatorship. In

46. *El Obrero Vasco*, 26 March 1921 and 28 July 1922. For more details see Mees, 'Nacionalismo vasco'.

the new political circumstances, ELA pursued a strategy not of resistance, but of cautious co-operation with the regime, applauding the new corporatist structuration of the economy and the social relations implanted in 1926. This favourable attitude, however, soon gave way to open criticism directed against the favouritism of the government towards the socialist trade unions. The participation in the elections to the Joint Committees (*Comités Paritarios*), from 1928 onwards in a coalition with other Catholic unions, increased the social influence of ELA in the province of Bizkaia, but did not silence critics of the manipulation of the corporatist Joint Committees, whose dissolution was demanded by the delegates of the nationalist trade union at their First National Congress celebrated in 1929 in Eibar.

This congress was an important step in the process of consolidation of the internal organisational structures of ELA. In Eibar, the first official programme was adopted. At the same time, the organisational structure was completed by the creation of a supreme instrument of decision-taking on a national scale, the *Confederación General de las Agrupaciones de Obreros Vascos*. Nevertheless, it was not until the Second National Union Congress of Vitoria in 1933 that ELA decided to do what the UGT had already done from 1910 onwards, that is, to substitute the traditional organisational splitting of the union into a large number of professional associations with the assembling of the affiliates in huge union-sections divided along the line of the different industrial branches.

For ELA, as for Basque nationalism in general, the end of the dictatorship meant an important period of apogee. The social services offered by the union to its members became even more necessary and attractive in the social crisis of the 1930s, and that was one of the reasons for the new success of the nationalist union, which from the congress of Eibar (1929) to that of Vitoria (1933) had passed from representing 7,700 workers (6,200 from Bizkaia, 1,500 from Gipuzkoa) to a total membership of 40,000, now also from Alava and Navarra.⁴⁷ The other reason was the general climate of nationalist euphoria provoked by the second autonomy-campaign led by the PNV. ELA supported this campaign from the beginning, and one consequence of this renewed close relationship between both organisations was the election of the ELA president Robles Arangiz and vice-president Heliodoro de la Torre on the lists of the PNV as deputies to the Spanish parliament.

The positive results of this binding to the autonomy-campaign and to the party became evident in 1933, the year of the referendum on the text of the autonomy-statute, when both the PNV and ELA reached their

climax of political and social power in their pre-Francoist history. Several factors reveal this increase of power. First of all, the above-mentioned national union-congress of Vitoria and its task of organisational and ideological consolidation. The new programme defined ELA as a moderate Catholic and nationalist trade union, based on the Christian values of 'justice and morality', opposed to any kind of class struggle and committed to a strategy of social reformism. Once the ELA's own organisation was consolidated, the delegates of the congress decided to join the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions created in 1920 in The Hague. A second factor was the success in creating organisations for Basque fishermen and peasants, organically not integrated in ELA, but closely linked to it. Thirdly, the support of the nationalist women's organisation *Emakume Abertzale Batza* (EAB), created in 1906, must be mentioned. EAB recommended its employed members, mostly nurses or schoolteachers, to affiliate to ELA.

The synchrony between ELA and the other nationalist organisations continued during the last two years of the Second Republic, in which ELA shifted to more leftist positions, as the PNV did partly, and especially the other nationalist party, the *Acción Nacionalista Vasca*. A brief analysis of this evolution has to consider three elements in order to explain this radicalisation. First of all, the increasing tension between the PNV and the Spanish right-wing parties due to the blockade of the Autonomy Statute was translated in the social arena into a growing gap between the rightist Catholic unions and ELA, which pushed the nationalist trade union to the left. These frictions, and this is the second element, increased in intensity, when in 1935 as a consequence of a new law on rustic tenancy many Basque peasants lost their farms, frequently the property of Basque monarchist landlords, which provoked hard opposition not only from the nationalist peasant-organisations (*Euzko-Nekazarien-Bazkuna*; *Euzko-Nekazarien-Alkartasuna*), but also from the nationalist and leftist political parties. As a third important factor we have to consider the participation of many *Solidarios* in the Revolutionary Strike of October 1934 despite the order given by the leaders of ELA and PNV to maintain a passive neutrality in that political strike against the fascist danger symbolised by the entry of members of the right-wing CEDA (*Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas*) into the new government. The victims of the following repression were both leftist and nationalist trade unionists and sympathisers.⁴⁸ This experience was another contribution towards

47. Granja, 'Solidaridad de Trabajadores Vascos'.

48. Various authors, *Octubre 1934 Urria*; Various authors, 'Protagonistas de la historia vasca' (interviews with the two ELA leaders P. Abad and R. de Zapirain).

surmounting the traditional gap between socialists and nationalists in the Basque Country and the definitive consolidation of ELA as a dynamic trade union defending the class interests of the Basque nationalist workers. The most significant consequence of this evolution was the defence of the Spanish Republic and the Basque Regional Autonomy against the Francoist putsch during the years of the Civil War. ELA organised three battalions and plenty of other *Solidarios* fought in the ranks of the *Euzko Gudarostea*, the army recruited by the PNV.

After the victory of the Francoists, who in June 1937 occupied Bilbao, a long period of exile and underground activity began for all Basque nationalists. The Francoist dictatorship brought a major transformation not only of Basque political nationalism, but also of the labour movement including ELA. During the four decades of exile, the historical union shared the problems that this new situation provoked in the Basque government and its main nationalist party, the PNV. Despite the efforts to maintain a close relationship with the social and political reality in the interior of the now Francoist Basque provinces, once ELA had established its Provisional Executive Committee in the French Basque Country, the conditions for a growing separation between the interests of the *Solidarios* on either side of the border were set. Whereas the leaders in exile were predominantly engaged in all kinds of bureaucratic and sometimes also financial help to the refugees, the organisation of a broad network of ELA solidarity-groups all over the world and the active participation in the most important federations of the international labour movement, the ELA unionists of the interior had to suffer the severe repression of the regime on the one hand and the consequences of the deplorable situation of the post-war autarky-economy on the other. This frustration of the underground ELA activists was mobilised and converted into collective action when at the end of the 1950s a new political opportunity was created. The liberalisation of the Spanish economy by the new Opus Dei bureaucrats in the government gave rise to the second industrial revolution in the Basque provinces. Massive immigration and accelerated social change challenged the traditional social, cultural and mental structures of society, which was once again condemned to support the effects of uncontrolled industrial growth. The rates of nearly full employment, and the liberalisation of labour relations by means of a direct and free election of the worker representatives in the different Basque enterprises in the frame of the Francoist vertical trade union, were both fundamental catalysts of the new phase of worker mobilisation from the 1960s. The ELA leadership in exile rejected the canalisation of the workers' unrest by this new way of participation in official institutions, opting for a strong

position of resistance. So did the other historical unions in exile, the socialist UGT and the anarcho-syndicalist CNT. Due to this common position, the three unions signed an agreement at the end of the 1950s founding the *Alianza Sindical del País Vasco*. This decision was an important impulse for the creation of a new, young worker movement not controlled by the three historical unions and ideologically independent at first, but later increasingly influenced by communists and left-wing Catholics. Exploiting to the utmost the possibilities of organisation offered by the regime, these groups surpassed rapidly the organisational frame of the enterprises and soon became the emblematic worker organisation of the new labour movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the Basque provinces and in Spain in general, known as *Comisiones Obreras*.⁴⁹

ELA had to pay a high price for its ethically honourable, but strategically not very intelligent immobilism. As a consequence of the new situation created in the interior and also of the (historically new) growing influence of Marxist ideologies in the Basque nationalist movement, ELA experienced what the PNV had also experienced when exiled:⁵⁰ in the mid-1960s, socialist-oriented dissidents broke the organisation-discipline and founded a new leftist ELA critical of the official union policy and its blind subordination to the conservative, bourgeois and passive PNV.

The evolution of both groups during the following years is a complicated and still quite unknown history of new splits and fusions resulting in the formation of a political party by some of the socialist dissidents (ESB, later integrated in the radical nationalist party *Herri Batasuna*) and the unification of the remaining groups, including the leaders recently returned from exile, at the Third National Congress celebrated in 1976 under a new, now clearly leftist programme.

Nowadays, the ELA of 1998 has very little in common with its predecessor of 1911. There is no more reference to Catholicism in its programme and the independence from political parties is complete. It is, however, still nationalist, since it defends the self-determination of the Basque Country and the creation of a Basque framework of labour relations, claiming as a first step to the achievement of these goals the full development of Basque regional autonomy. The ELA-leaders are very critical of ETA-terrorism, considering it a 'factor that contributes to

49. Ruiz, *Historia de Comisiones Obreras*; Ibarra, *El movimiento obrero en Vizcaya*; Lang, *Das baskische Labyrinth*.

50. For more details and further bibliographical information see Mees, 'Zwischen Mobilisierung und Institutionalisierung'.

weaken, divide and de-motivate the nationalist struggle'.⁵¹ Despite this criticism, since 1995 ELA has established together with the radical nationalist union LAB a sort of nationalist union-front, even if this union forms part of the monolithic block of organisations around ETA. When in March 1996 the terrorists assassinated a member of the Basque police, who had also been a member of ELA, this nationalist front was about to break down, since LAB was not willing to change its habitual attitude towards terrorism and to condemn this new terrorist outrage. Finally, the National Committee of ELA decided to continue for the moment the collaboration with LAB, claiming nevertheless for the future a 'more autonomous and critical' attitude of LAB as a basic condition for the 'consolidation of spaces of collaboration' between both unions.⁵² This decision, as well as – in general – the surprising success of both nationalist unions since the years of the *Transition* and the democratic consolidation, demonstrate once again the dynamic of nationalist ideology and its capacity to penetrate different social classes, including the working class.

Some Conclusions

The analysis of Basque nationalism and the role the workers played in it may contribute to a better orientation in the jungle of theoretical approaches to nationalism, since it confirms two hypotheses pointed out by recent studies. The first is that the industrial working class apparently does not belong to the initiators of nationalist movements, who in the Basque Country were also mainly members of the displaced middle classes, ideologically guided and backed by a particular intelligentsia with important clerical ingredients. On the other hand – and this is the second point – this affirmation does not allow any deterministic and dogmatic interpretation of nationalism as a bourgeois movement, as there is no 'determinate link between class and territory but a variety of relationships according to economic and political circumstances'.⁵³

Basque nationalism was shaped from a minority lower-middle-class protest to a popular, mostly young cross-class social movement, in which the industrial workers as well as the peasants and fishermen started to integrate themselves in phase B of the model of Hroch, the phase of

51. See the resolution of the communiqué of the ELA National Committee (11 March 1996) published in *Landeia*, April 1996, pp. 9–14.

52. *Ibid.*, 11.

53. See Keating, 'Do the Workers Really Have no Country?', 62–80, quotation on p. 78–9.

political agitation, constituting together with the urban middle classes the popular mass basis of Basque nationalism during Phase C. Thus, the interesting comparison articulated by Eric Hobsbawm between Catalan nationalism and its move to the left 'in order to integrate a powerful and independent labour movement' and Basque nationalism that 'succeeded in isolating and eventually practically eliminating the traditional working-class socialist movements'⁵⁴ is correct, but it shows only one side of the coin, because it omits the important organisational success of the nationalists in the non-socialist sector of the working class. Nationalism in Catalonia was divided into several organisations occupying the political spectrum from the right to the left and its cultural patterns at least reached into the ranks of the anarchosyndicalist labour movement, even if the organisational nucleus of political Catalanism, the *Lliga Regionalista* from the beginning of the twentieth century, was much more bourgeois than the Basque PNV. In the Basque Country, on the contrary, the situation was different. The process of socio-economic modernisation was more radical and abrupt than that of Catalonia, the nineteenth-century experience with war and liberal centralism more traumatic and the main element of cultural particularism, the Basque language, was in far more danger of extinction than Catalan. Consequently, Basque society was highly polarised in nationalists and anti-nationalists, and there was no space for mediators.

In this context it is interesting to mention the significant weakness of federalist republicanism in the Basque provinces. Workers who felt nationalist or only Basquist could not find a cultural and political home in an extremely centralist socialist movement in which the demands of saving and recovering the elements of national particularism used to be considered as a reactionary and anachronistic regression to the Middle Age, excepting cases like that of Basquist socialism in Eibar. On the other hand, socialist workers, local or immigrants, could not have anything in common with a nationalism whose idiosyncrasy was a radical and xenophobic anti-socialism. This polarisation as well as the policy of exclusion and mistrust practised by the Spanish governments, both leftist and rightist, facilitated the integration and cohesion of the nationalist cross-class coalition which, in spite of the class-conflicts between nationalist workers and employers, only split when a serious socio-economic crisis combined with increasing class struggles coincided with an interinal political crisis of the nationalist movement (1921), or when faced with an exceptional situation of general political and social

54. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 140.

transformation like the transition from dictatorship to democracy in 1930/1. Any proposal to create a nationalist worker-party had not the slightest possibility of being successful, because there was no chance of gaining any support from outside the nationalist movement. In a similar way the few attempts to introduce a certain Basquist sensibility in the politics of the socialist movement were for a long time condemned to fail.

It was not until the new period of social mobilisation during the Francoist regime from the 1960s that this structural background changed radically. For the first time in the history of Basque nationalism the influence of Marxist thought, combined with the criticism of the traditional, conservative ideological patterns and the passivity of an exile without any positive expectation, broke the homogeneity of the movement in both its political and its labour wing. For the young rebels, nationalism was no longer the counterpart of socialism. Instead, the second had to become a necessary ingredient of the first. The task of bringing together socialism and nationalism was not at all an easy one. A great number of splits in the nationalist left, including the ELA union, with regard to this conflict between social solidarity and national identity, substantiate this difficulty. This problem has not disappeared today, as the dissolution of the leftist nationalist party *Euskadiko Ezkerra* has recently demonstrated.

Abbreviations

ANV	<i>Acción Nacionalista Vasca</i>
CADCI	<i>Centre Autonomista de Dependents del Comerç i Industria</i>
CC.OO.	<i>Comisiones Obreras</i>
CEDA	<i>Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas</i>
CNT	<i>Confederación Nacional de Trabajo</i>
CNV	<i>Comunión Nacionalista Vasca</i>
EAB	<i>Emakume Abertzale Batza</i>
ELA	<i>Eusko Langileen Alkartasuna</i>
HB	<i>Herri Batasuna</i>
LAB	<i>Langile Abertzaleen Batzordeak</i>
PNV	<i>Partido Nacionalista Vasco</i>
PSOE	<i>Partido Socialista Obrero Español</i>
UGT	<i>Unión General de Trabajadores</i>

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