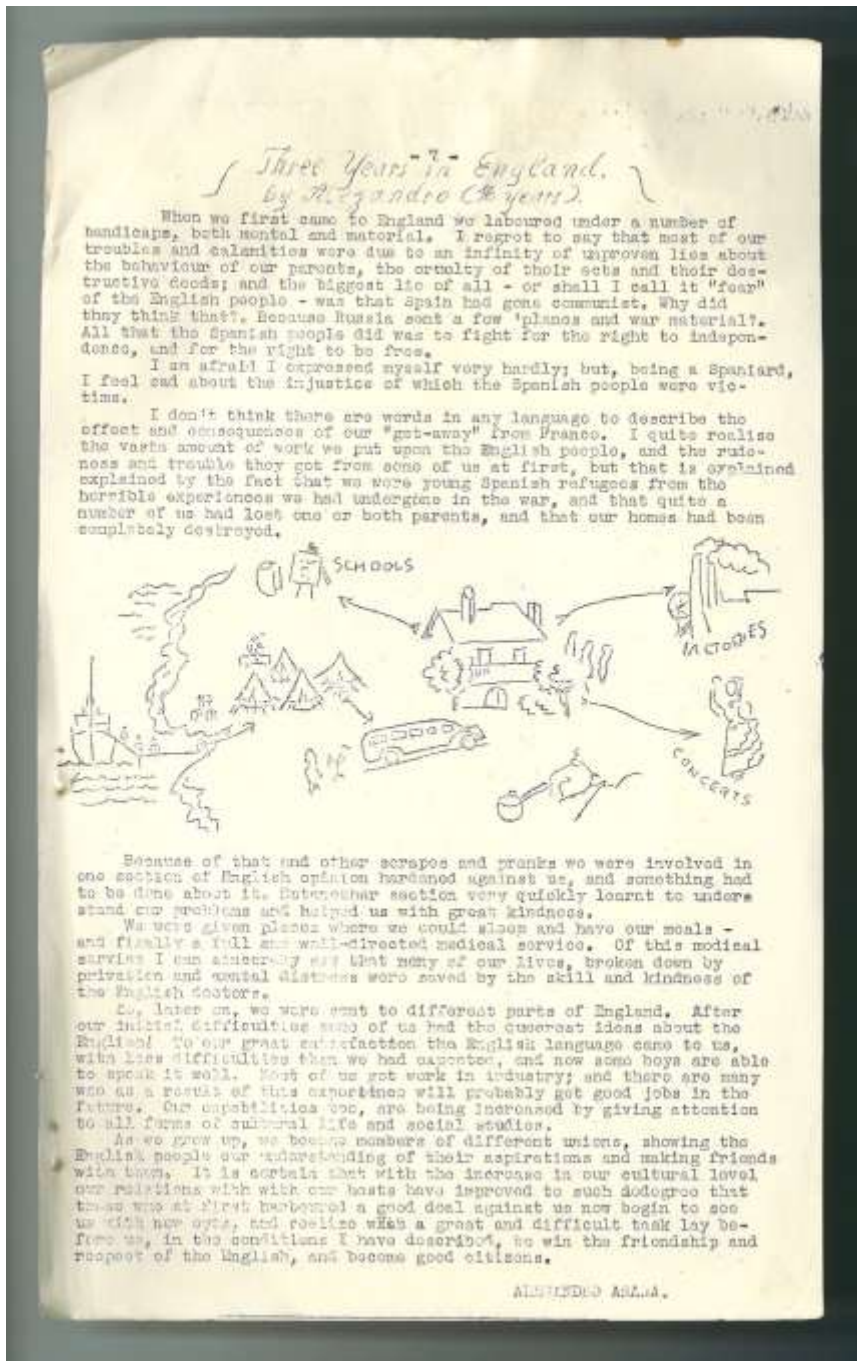


**Telling our stories – writings of the Basque child refugees:
 (7a) “Three years in England” by Alejandro Arana aged 16 years,
 in the *Periodico de los chicos espanoles en Inglaterra* (Magazine of
 the Spanish boys in England) No 1, 23 May 1940**



“When we first came to England we laboured under a number of handicaps, both mental and material. I regret to say that most of our troubles and calamities were due to an infinity of unproven lies about the behaviour of our parents, the cruelty of their

acts and their destructive deeds; and the biggest lie of all – or shall I call it ‘fear’ of the English people – was that Spain had gone communist. Why did they think that? Because Russia sent a few ‘planes and war material? All that the Spanish people did was to fight for the right to independence, and for the right to be free.

I am afraid I expressed myself very hardly; but, being a Spaniard, I feel sad about the injustice of which the Spanish people were victims.

I don’t think there are words in any language to describe the effect and consequences of our ‘get-away’ from Franco. I quite realise the vast amount of work we put upon the English people, and the rudeness and trouble they got from some of us at first, but that is explained by the fact that we were young Spanish refugees from the horrible experiences we had undergone in the war, and that quite a number of us had lost one or both parents, and that our homes had been completely destroyed.

Because of that and other scrapes and pranks we were involved in one section of English opinion hardened against us, and something had to be done about it. But another section very quickly learnt to understand our problems and helped us with great kindness.

We were given places where we could sleep and have our meals – and finally a full and well-directed medical service. Of this medical service I can sincerely say that many of our lives, broken down by privation and mental distress were saved by the skill and kindness of the English doctors.

So, later on, we were sent to different parts of England. After our initial difficulties some of us had the queerest ideas about the English! To our great satisfaction the English language came to us with less difficulties than we had expected, and now some boys are able to speak it well. Most of us work in industry; and there are many who as a result of this experience will probably get good jobs in the future. Our capabilities too, are being increased by giving attention to all forms of cultural life and social studies.

As we grew up, we became members of different unions, showing the English people our understanding of their aspirations and making friends with them. It is certain that with the increase in our cultural level our relations with our hosts have improved to such a degree that those who at first harboured a good deal against us now begin to see us with new eyes, and realise what a great and difficult task lay before us, in conditions I have described, to win the friendship and respect of the English, and become good citizens.”