

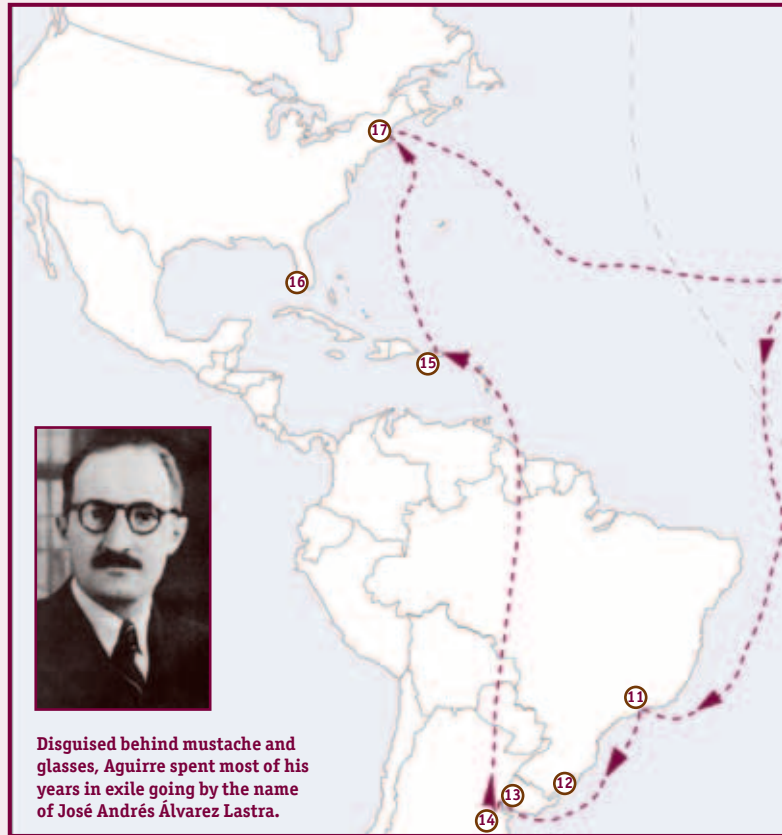
In July 1937, José Antonio de Aguirre was forced to leave Euskadi. This marked the beginning of an odyssey replete with incidents and calamities that took him through Europe and the Americas. His family followed suit, undergoing tragic and at times inconceivable situations. It would be a journey of no return, ending with the untimely death of the Lehendakari in Paris in 1960.

1937- In August the companies of Basque soldiers or *gudaris* abandoned the last strip of Basque territory through Trucios, Bizkaia, surrounded by Franco's troops. Aguirre drew up a farewell manifesto expressing his faith in the future of the Basque people. He then went to Santander and flew to Biarritz on the *Negus*, a plane owned by the Basque army. In Biarritz he met up with his wife and daughter, Aintzane, who had been evacuated when the Basque Government issued a decree for all women, children and elderly to leave Euskadi. A few days later Aguirre set up shop in Catalonia to head the Basque Government out of a villa in Pedralbes in the outskirts of Barcelona.

1939- On February 4th he crossed the border together with Companys, the President of Catalonia. Joining them were Manuel Irujo, July Jauregui and Catalanian leaders Josep Tarradellas and Nicolau d'Oliver. The seat of the Basque Government was established on 11 Marceau Avenue. From there the Lehendakari began the task of seeing to the needs of the more than 150,000 Basque refugees. When the second world war was declared, the Basque Government took the initiative to offer its collaboration with France and England.

1940- On May 8th Aguirre left Paris for La Panne, a Belgian city located fifteen kilometers from Dunkirk and three from the French border, in order for his family living in Lovaina at the time to be able to see his children Aintzane and Joseba, the latter born in 1938. The family visit put them in the middle of one of the most important battles of early World War II, and from that point the Lehendakari lost contact with nationalist leaders. The Nazi offensive against France and Belgium forced José Antonio de Aguirre and the group of Basques accompanying him to cross the border on foot, dodging bombs, and make their way to the last French town on the coast, Bray Dunes, where they would escape by sea. One of the bomb attacks killed José Anonio's sister Encarna, and his wife, Mari, was detained and accused of being a spy. Returning to La Panne, Aguirre decided not to put the rest of the group at risk, traveling alone to Brussels and then on to Berlin. He thought that the only place where the Nazis wouldn't find him was right in the heart of Germany. Meanwhile, he encouraged the rumor to be spread that he was in London.

On June 1st Aguirre made it to Brussels by car with a Catalanian couple and a Basque Jesuit, taking refuge in the convent of San Francisco Javier. From there he took a train to Antwerp, while his family settled in Lovaina. The Panamanian consul, Guardia Jaén, provided him with false documentation stating that he was José Andrés Alvarez Lastra (with first and last initials coinciding with his own), Panamanian citizen, single, with a PhD in Law and landowner in the province of Chiriqui. Aguirre grew a beard and started wearing glasses to help conceal his identity. With permission from the Gestapo itself, he was allowed to travel to Germany. However, before leaving Belgium, Aguirre decided to visit his family in Lovaina, where he spent Christmas with his wife, children, mother and two brothers.



Disguised behind mustache and glasses, Aguirre spent most of his years in exile going by the name of José Andrés Álvarez Lastra.

STAGES OF EXILE: 1. Santander; 2. Biarritz; 3. Barcelona; 4. Paris; 5. La Panne (Belgium); 6. Antwerp; 7. Hamburg; 8. Berlin; 9. Sassnitz (Germany);

1941- On January 7th Aguirre took a train to Hamburg and began to record his impressions in a diary. Although he had no intention of publishing his writings, the manuscript crossed several borders concealed in either a sock or a doll's head. It would eventually become part of another more carefully written diary included in *De Guernica a Nueva York pasando por Berlín* (From Gernika to New York via Berlin), a book covering his experiences until May 28th 1942. This was the loneliest and most harrowing part of his exile. From Hamburg, Aguirre traveled to Berlin, where he suffered great hardships: "The streets are covered in snow. I can feel the damp through my old worn out shoes... I had a cheap meal. Then I walked through the streets of Berlin for nearly two hours looking at shop windows... This is the story of a poor man who lived like a rich man, or at least that's how it seemed."

During those months of political inactivity Aguirre took refuge in reading: "... mainly thoughtful reading that makes me consider problems and compare certain things to our own situation. This distracts me, shifting my attention from becoming too absorbed in intense worries." The pages from his diary written at that time reflect his state of mind during the seemingly endless wait for documents which would allow him to leave the country, coupled with a lack of news from his family: "This lack of communication is anxiety, imposition and slow torment... things are taking so long. If only wishing and hoping were enough to make things happen, just think of the amount of things I could do."

On March 1st Aguirre's wife and children finally made it to Berlin. In his diary he refers to his wife as *señora Guerra* (Mrs. War), *la viuda*



The journey of no return

10. Göteborg (Sweden); 11. Rio de Janeiro; 12. Rio Grande (Brazil); 13. Montevideo; 14. Buenos Aires; 15. Puerto Rico; 16. Miami; 17. New York; 18. Paris.

(the widow) or María, who was traveling with false documents as a widow born in Mérida, Venezuela. The ultimate goal was to go to the United States, but the family had to travel in several stages in order to get there. On May 23rd they went by car to Sassnitz, the last German port, where they boarded a ship to Göteborg, Sweden. "I breathed a sigh of relieve once we were on the Swedish vessel. Free at last! (...) Our documents were strange at all the hotels we checked into. Nowhere did it show that this widow and this doctor, with two children in tow, were married."

The family remained in Sweden until July 31st, when they were provided with the necessary passage and documents to embark on the merchant ship Vasaholm, which would take them across the Atlantic, but to Rio de Janeiro instead of the United States. On September 22nd Aguirre wrote in his diary: "Wasting so much time makes me nervous because in addition to spending a lot of money living out of hotels, it has also been a long time since I've been able to make contact with my countrymen, which is so important. (...) I am dragging out any possible solution or at least the chance to solve some of the terrible problems facing Basque families and countrymen living in Belgium, France, Euskadi, in Spanish prisons and even in Africa." On October 3rd they boarded the Itapé bound for Rio Grande do Sul, the Brazilian state on the Uruguayan border, whose capital city is Rio Grande. A week later they took a train to the border with Uruguay and made their way to Montevideo. This was when Aguirre stopped being José Andrés Alvarez Lastra and took on his real persona as Lehendakari. Awaiting him was the press, the Basque colony in exile and a spate of tributes.

"Fantastic welcome... My countrymen are so very dear. I take off my hat to all of them who suffer so greatly." He was received in a solemn session of the Parliament, and was given a reception in his honor by the President of the Republic of Uruguay, General Baldomir, attended by the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. On October 16th Aguirre disembarked in the Argentinean capital, Buenos Aires, where he was also received by cheering crowds, and the President of the nation, Roberto Ortiz. Washington recommended that the Lehendakari's arrival be carried in as discrete a fashion as possible, via Trinidad, Puerto Rico and Miami, thus obliging him to travel by plane in a series of stages. His wife and children sailed directly to New York. Aguirre took a train from Miami to Philadelphia and another one to the Big Apple, arriving on November 6th. The Aguirre family established their residence in White Plains, New York, where Aguirre worked as a History professor at Columbia University. The family remained in New York until 1946. During this time Aguirre took a number of politically motivated trips. The most difficult part of his exile had come to an end.

1942- In May Aguirre finished his book *De Guernica a Nueva York pasando por Berlín*. He visited several Latin American countries in the summer and fall: Guatemala, Panama, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. He gave conferences at different universities and took advantage of his stays to organize Basque exile communities in Latin America and to spread the ideals of Basque nationalism, democracy and equality. His third child, Iñaki, was born in New York in 1943.

1945- Aguirre flew to Paris aboard a US military plane. He also traveled to London, where he met with the Basque Government Office and with different figures from the Catholic Church.

1946- This year marked Aguirre's definitive return to Europe. After several months in Saint Jean de Luz, he settled in Paris. During this time he took a number of trips to Latin America. He inaugurated the new headquarters for the Basque center in Caracas, and visited both Havana and Mexico. On July 3rd 1951 the French Government gave the Basque Government 48 hours to move out of its Marceau Avenue headquarters since the building was to be turned over to the Franco regime. The Lehendakari moved into a small villa on Singer Street, with funding provided by Basque refugees residing in Latin America.

1954- spring Aguirre went back to visit the Basque communities in Venezuela, Mexico, Havana, New York and Washington. The following year he revisited Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. In Santiago de Chile he attended the First Christian Democrat International Congress in Latin America.

1956- The Basque World Congress was celebrated in Paris between September 23rd and October 1st. At the event the Lehendakari explained the work the Basque Government had carried out from the time of its creation on October 7th 1936.

1960- On March 22nd Aguirre died suddenly in Paris from a heart attack. Five days later he was buried in the Saint Jean de Luz cemetery.