

# Basque Activists—Héroes or Villains?

By **RICHARD EDER**

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MADRID, Dec. 16—In a crowded Bilbao restaurant a couple of weeks ago, a Swedish journalist asked a Basque lawyer why the Basque guerrilla group known as ETA should be judged any differently from say, the French Canadian extremists who recently kidnapped a

Briton and killed a Canadian. The question reflects

Analysis the confusion that has marked the present Spanish crisis, growing out of the court-martial of 15 ETA members on charges of banditry and, in the case of six, of killing a secret-police inspector.

The question is not sufficiently answered by the slogans of demonstrators in the other European capitals or by accounts sent by some European journalists that present the trial in the Basque city of Burgos as a simple case of Franco tyranny versus democratic resistance.

## Line Includes Nixon

It is also not answered by the official Spanish accounts threaded through the local press, which describe ETA as a platoon of Marxist-Leninist separatist terrorist gang. The groups activity is compared to that of the Quebec extremists or the American Weathermen. And a common line of opposition to this activity is drawn neatly from Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau to President Nixon to Generalissimo Francisco Franco.

The Basque lawyer's answer was: "You cannot speak in the same way of those who use violence against a dictatorship as of those who use it, for whatever laudable purpose, against a government that allows free expression and political activity."

The lawyer was a Basque na-

tionalist and a man of the left, and he was at least sympathetic to ETA, which calls for violence to create an independent, socialist Basque state. Another answer comes from quite a different viewpoint, that of one of the few non-Basque lawyers in the Burgos defense.

"I did not agree with perhaps 30 per cent of the views of the other lawyers," he said. "I was not defending ETA nor even Basque nationalism. I was fighting the use of court-martials for political cases, and the use of police torture to build the prosecution's case."

## Opponent of Franco

This lawyer, a liberal, is a public opponent of the Franco Government. He has little sympathy for the vision of an independent Basque state that is shared, at least romantically, by many Basques who shun the violent methods of ETA.

The entire defense panel at Burgos—whose political views range from moderate to extreme left, and whose views on Basque nationalism range from impassioned advocacy to puzzled incomprehension—were horrified by the kidnapping of Eugen Beihl, hpnoraó West Germán cónsul in San Sebastian, ori Dec. 1.

The lawyers say they do not approve of kidnappings, and all say they foresaw political repercussions for the Burgos trial, which began Dec. 3.

Those tried at Burgos, for six of whom death sentences are asked, have been behind bars for nearly two years and have no conceivable connection with the kidnapping. But the kidnapping did allow official spokesmen to blur what would originally have been a trial before world opinion of the peculiar problems of the Franco dictatorship, and to argue that it was simply one more

instance of a member of the world community's wrestling with a problem that affects them all.

Moreover, ETA is split into various groups, with varying ideas about the tactics of violence, and the kidnappers are classified as part of a splinter group that has still to be identified.

## Violence Organized

Police pressure on the Basques precedes by a long time the killing of the police inspector, the bank-robberies and the detonating of bombs.

Despite the group's belligerent rhetoric, virtually all of the ETA operations—including the setting off of bombs in deserted places at midnight—were so organized to avoid killing anyone. But plainclothesmen and the civil guards were arresting Basques—and in some cases torturing them—10 and 15 years ago, for writing and distributing propaganda, for running language schools, for flying Basque flags or even for playing the xistu, or Basque flute.

If Spain were a democracy, and if the Basque culture, language and forms of community organization had been allowed to develop freely, would there have developed a strain of separatist violence? It is interesting to note that in France, where the Basques are free to organize their own lives—although the centralism of the French Government annoys them—the ideas of the French Basque equivalent of ETA have failed to take hold.