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INTE

CIA 4 SPAIN

'Viva la CIA?'

NEGATIVE and nefarious though Eta's present tactics may be, two Eta men who were murdered in December must be numbered among the founders of Spain's present regime.

Joaquín María Azaola, aged 55, was shot by three youth in Bilbao on December 19. Eta-Militar announced that he had been "executed" because he had become a police informer. In the summer of 1974 Azaola was one of the organizers of an Eta operation whose aim was to kidnap Prince (now King) Juan Carlos and his wife, father and children in the Mediterranean while they were sailing to Monte Carlo. Azaola, posing as the secretary of a rich Belgian, hired a big yacht for the purpose.

The hostages were to have been landed in the south of France and concealed until Franco released 100 Basque prisoners and paid a ransom; but they might well have been killed. Azaola had doubts about the plan and consulted a member of the Basque government-in-exile, who advised him to contact the Spanish police. He did so and cancelled the operation. Were it not for Azaola, King Juan Carlos, the pilot of Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy, might never have come to the throne.

And but for 29-year-old José Miguel Beñarán, who was killed by anti-Eta activists at Anglet, in Southwest France, on December 21, the man holding Spain's political reins when Franco died would, barring an accident, have been Admiral Carrero Blanco, the dictator's close adviser and prime minister and his choice to supervise the succession. Carrero, a tough Right-winger, was the head of the main secret services and controlled the administration: He was committed to insuring the "continuity" of the Franco regime after Franco, and King Juan Carlos

would have found it almost impossible to persuade him to concede reforms of a democratic nature. He was assassinated in central Madrid on December 20, 1973, by four Eta men who placed an explosive charge beneath the street he drove along every morning and blew the car he was driving in over a five-storey building. The man who detonated the charge was José Miguel Beñarán.

A former Spanish secret agent, Luis González-Mata, alleges in a recently published book, *Terrorismo Internacional* (Argos, Barcelona), that the CIA knew something about the Basques' preparations to kill Carrero. The Eta men neglected some elementary security precautions—so flagrantly that even my inexpert eye was surprised, as I noted in an article after the assassination—and their carelessness attracted the attention of a CIA officer in the nearby American embassy. Unlike most Spanish stories about the CIA, González-Mata's account shows the agency in what many democrats will consider a favorable light. Having consulted Washington, the CIA's Madrid station not only did not denounce or interfere with the plotters, it helped them discreetly (González-Mata says), thus contributing to the demolition of authoritarianism in Spain.

So should Spanish democrats spray "Viva la CIA!" on the walls of Madrid? That would be a delightful sight. Unfortunately, González-Mata can't be sure; he knows only part of the story. That's my trouble, too. I wish some kind CIA defector (or nondefector, preferably) would lend me the appropriate file for an hour or two.