

SPAIN IN THE WAR

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THE present conflict involved at the outset many imponderables. The course of events has brought a number of revelations, both welcome and unwelcome, but certain other factors remain somewhat obscure. One of these is the exact attitude and relationship of Spain to the belligerent powers. At the time of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), two opposing schools of thought had arisen. One held that the non-interventionist policies of the western democracies had left an open door to German-Italian interference, with the consequent solid union of Spain to the Axis. In any approaching conflict, accordingly, Spain could be counted definitely in the enemy camp, in which she would be of very great value to her allies. The other school preferred a pro-Fascist dictatorship in Spain to what they feared would become an extremist Left government tied to the Comintern. While admitting certain risks in allowing German-Italian intervention, they believed that the power of British gold and British trade relations would finally prevail over the Nazi-Fascist political and military machinations. It is interesting now to examine how far the hopes and fears of both schools have been realized, or seem likely to be realized, in the light of recent developments.

We might first consider the reasons why Western Europe has begun to be concerned about Spain. Until the outbreak of the civil war, she was a third-rate political power little known or considered by her neighbours. There was something about that war, however, which showed immediately that it was not merely another of Spain's intermittent domestic conflicts. Here was seen the first open clash between two ideologies which seemed destined ere long to engulf the great powers of the world. Furthermore, the strategic position of Spain in the struggle foreshadowed in the larger arena was recognized as important. As a power hostile to the western democracies, Spain might force France to divide her strength in order to fight on a Pyrenees front; she might assist in an attack on Gibraltar; and she might provide her allies with valuable submarine and air bases.

In view of these facts, it is remarkable that hitherto Spain has not given more obvious assistance to Germany and Italy in more than a year of warfare. The supposed possession of the Balearic Islands by Italy, and of the Canary Islands by Germany, for belligerent purposes, has not materialized. The fact that Franco lost no time in declaring himself neutral when Great Britain and France declared war on Germany suggests either that reports of Axis penetration had been exaggerated, or that difficulties lay in the way of Spain's playing her expected rôle. While no doubt reports of German-Italian control in Spain have often enlarged upon actual observed fact, as always happens, the real reason for Spain's non-participation appears to be the presence of major obstacles.

One of these is the fact that, when this war broke out, Spain had had but little more than five months' respite from her own civil war. Many cities and towns lay in ruins, and a serious food-shortage threatened. The prisons were still filled with political prisoners, and national unity, as understood and imposed by totalitarian theory and discipline, was not yet securely established. The known strength of the British and French navies was another deterrent, as Spain had a long and vulnerable coastline with very meagre naval protection. In short, Spain had internal and strategic weaknesses which made it desirable, both to herself and to the Axis, that she remain in the background during the opening rounds of the contest.

There was no substantial basis, therefore, for the view of certain optimists that Franco earnestly desired friendship with Great Britain and France, and would gladly sever his connections with Germany and Italy. Franco's advancement from a state of "neutrality" to that of "non-belligerency" at the time of Italy's declaration of war, along with the seizure of Tangier (previously governed by an international commission), is sufficient evidence to the contrary. Spain, whose continued non-belligerency is now being courted by Great Britain and the United States, is as definitely in the war against us now as was Italy in the months prior to her open declaration. At the present time, she gives more substantial support to the Axis as a non-belligerent than she would probably be able to give in an open military alliance.

A more detailed examination of the internal political weaknesses of Spain makes this obvious. In the now defunct Spanish Republic, there were at least twenty-one political parties. In the civil war, nine of these supported Franco, while

twelve supported the Loyalist government.¹ Of the nine parties supporting Franco, at least two, the Navarrese Requetés and the Falangists, gave him trouble even during the conflict.² The Requetés are disliked by the Syndicalist-Fascist Falangists on account of their clerical and pro-Bourbon leanings, while the social programme and anticlericalism of the Falangists are uncongenial to the strictly traditionalist parties. Franco has not gained firm control over a single ruling party, as have other dictators. It is doubtful if a military venture would secure it. Open belligerency, therefore, might give Franco's régime serious difficulties even with its present supporters, and these difficulties would have their repercussions upon the interests of the Axis. The civil war made of Spain a fruitful source of supply for the Axis war-machine, and a resumption of internal disorders in Spain while soldiers, airplanes and tanks are occupied elsewhere would be very embarrassing to Franco's foreign masters. While ruthless measures, learned in Hitler's school and assisted by the Gestapo, have suppressed Leftist opposition, the arming of that opposition for a foreign war would be a highly dangerous step. Republicans may be angry at Great Britain and France for their "non-intervention" which left the Axis free to intervene in Franco's favour, but the majority of them are even more angry at Franco, and would take advantage of any favourable opportunity for revenge. True, the Republican leaders have been for the most part either executed or driven into exile, but it would still be dangerous for Franco to give fresh leadership an opportunity to reveal and assert itself, and that opportunity might easily be offered in a foreign war, particularly if reverses came to increase its unpopularity.

Spain's assistance to our enemies, therefore, while overshadowed by the din and clatter of guns and bombs in other parts, is none the less real and probably more effective than open belligerency in present circumstances. Spain is exceptionally rich in iron, copper, manganese, mercury and other minerals, and during the civil war Germany was able, with characteristic thoroughness, to organize much of this production for her own benefit. From Germany's first intervention in the summer of 1936 to the outbreak of the present war, maritime trade routes were open between Spain and Germany. Germany was therefore able during that period to make full use of Spain's resources for the acquisition of raw materials for war-making,

1. See F. White: *War in Spain* (Longmans, Green, 1937), pp. 75-76.

2. See Duchess of Atholl: *Searchlight on Spain* (Penguin, 1938), pp. 295-296.

while at the same time experimenting with her finished equipment, on Franco's behalf, until the latter's final victory at the end of March, 1939. A further feature which worked to the advantage of Germany was the early conquest by Franco of the territory richest in mineral resources, though the Loyalists did hold the mercury mines at Almaden till near the end of the war. Italy, of course, benefitted likewise, but on a smaller scale. Hitler was quite willing to allow to the Italian soldiers supporting Franco the glory of conquest, provided that Germany received the lion's share of the profit.

The declaration of war against Germany by Great Britain and France changed the picture. Ore shipments to Germany, owing to the naval blockade, could then be made with safety only *via* the then non-belligerent Italy. Though this was not an easy route, it obviated a complete blockade of Spanish minerals. At that time Italy, as a non-belligerent, was free to buy in the world's markets for her partner's as well as her own benefit. This particular service was less necessary when the defeat of France was assured; accordingly Italy was called in for the finishing stroke. At that time the Spanish press assumed a bellicose attitude towards the Allies, while Franco seized Tangier. There can be little doubt that Spain was ready to accept a rôle similar to that just played by Italy against France; that is, at an opportune moment she would deliver the knockout blow to Great Britain, seizing Gibraltar while her allies completed their work elsewhere. Spain could also be used to offer further threats to France in Morocco if France objected to the final peace terms offered to her. The failure of the attack on Great Britain has postponed this move, because, until a thrust appears certain of success, Spain can be more serviceable to her friends, as well as to her own interests, by clinging to her present rôle. In spite of repeated reports of German-Italian pressure upon Franco to enter the war, it is highly doubtful if Spain would be left non-belligerent and inviolate if an attack on Gibraltar or Portugal best served the Axis interests in present circumstances. So long as a quick victory is impossible, the principal usefulness of a militarily weak and superficially united Spain would appear to be as a source of supply, and for this purpose the French railways are now available. Hitler, in demarcating his "occupied zone" in France, was careful to include the most direct rail route from the Spanish border at Irún to Germany. This route, while more difficult than the sea-route open before the war, is a tremendous improvement upon the long and much-broken

Italian route. Spanish minerals bear much the same relation to Hitler's supply problem as does the oil of eastern Europe. In neither case is the supply sufficient for Axis needs, but both can make valuable contributions.

Despite Franco's friendly relations with the Axis, moreover, the Axis is not likely to urge Spain to wage war in the interests of Spain. The ultimate aims of Hitler and Mussolini are not completely in harmony with those of Franco. The boasted "new order" is not concerned with a revival of the once great Spanish empire. While welcoming Franco's cooperation to secure the destruction of Britain's control of the Mediterranean and France's African empire, neither of the Axis partners is interested in "*hispanidad*," that is, in the formation of a solid Spanish cultural unity. Franco is naturally unwilling to enter the field against Great Britain unless the expected spoils are commensurate with the effort, and Hitler can hardly be expected to hand over rich spoils to a country whose military effort would be so weak and so dependent upon him for the machinery of war. Moreover, Franco's ambitions in the direction of close economic and political relationship with a group of sub-dictatorships in Spanish America, thus forming in substance the old Spanish empire without the effort of reconquest, come into direct conflict with Hitler's plans in the New World. In north-western Africa, also, Mussolini is unlikely to view with favour the transference to Spain of a large block of former French territory.

Regarding the relationship between Franco's imperialism and British interests, the only immediate point of cleavage is Gibraltar, and possibly Portugal. True, a firm Hispanism might interfere with British commercial interests in Spanish America, but the formation of a solid imperial unit confronts too many natural obstacles within Hispanism itself to constitute a serious menace. Though most Latin-American countries (with the conspicuous exceptions of Mexico, Uruguay and Chile) have governments favourable to Franco, none of these has assured permanency, and one could expect determined opposition in most of these countries to the establishment of puppet dictatorships. The country most affected by Franco's proposed movement is the United States, whose Pan-Americanism under her own hegemony would be seriously threatened by a successful Pan-Hispanic movement, even if it stopped short of strong control by the remote Spanish government. The only immediate threat to Great Britain, then, is an attack on Gibraltar, but

Franco will wish to be in a position to make a much greater contribution to that effort than he can make at present. He must first carry forward his programme for reviving Spain as a great power, so that he will have sufficient bargaining power with his allies to justify his joining in a common enterprise with them.

Another point of disharmony between Spain and Germany merits some attention. While Franco and Hitler have a common jealousy of the rôle played by Great Britain in the world's affairs and markets, and would be pleased to destroy her "empire," their spiritual paths soon diverge. The majority of Franco's supporters desire a strongly entrenched Roman Church, and have no sympathy with Nazi neo-paganism. Besides, Franco was in earnest when he fought to "save Spain from Bolshevism." The Russo-German non-aggression pact of August, 1939, led naturally to misgivings regarding the true attitude of the Teutonic ally towards the communist bogey. The Spanish press could condone it only by the plea of hard necessity, forced upon Germany by the obdurate British-French unreasonableness regarding the "legitimate demands" of the "have-not" nations. Franco's government is sympathetic to the idea of strong central control of all the country's activities, but is not willing to substitute Nietzschean superman philosophy for Christian dogma, however degraded the Christianity practised by the Spanish privileged classes.

With Italy, Spain has closer racial and cultural bonds than with Germany, but not sufficiently close to render the countries congenial to each other. Here the bond of union is again mainly negative, formed by common animosities directed first against France, on account of her North-African empire, and secondly against Great Britain, because of her control of Mediterranean trade-routes. As stated, Franco's aims depend upon his being able to build up his country as a great European power. If this gained him a sufficient area of adjacent African territory to command the respect of Spain's American daughters, these might again be induced to accept their mother's leadership. Educated Italians, however, know that Italy has no happy memories of an imperial Spain, under which many parts of their country suffered for centuries. They could hardly now be induced to look with favour upon a Spain with ambitions for power rivalling that of Italy in the Mediterranean arena. Spain's help would be welcome, but not if she were strong enough to bargain. On the other hand, Franco will be very hesitant about fighting as a mere satellite, if he can find means to avoid it.

The question now arises as to why Franco signed a trade agreement with France, January 13, 1940, and a similar agreement with Great Britain the following March 18. Optimists greeted this development as a sure sign of a Spanish rapprochement with the Allies. A superficial examination of the facts, however, would have shattered this theory. The close of the civil war had made it possible for Spain and Germany to work out a barter agreement highly satisfactory to both countries. This pleasant intercourse was rudely disturbed by the outbreak of the present war. The British and French navies made it impossible for Spain to find means of transportation for all her normal trade with Germany. The agreements with the Allied Powers, therefore, were dictated by hard necessity, and were no evidence of sympathy for their cause. However incomplete may be the sympathy of Franco for Germany and Italy, the fact remains that the aspirations of Spain and the Axis run counter to the interests of Great Britain and France. Any expansion in Africa must be at their expense. The trade agreements, moreover, were signed before the defeat of France. They may be still of some service, but, as we have seen, their necessity is greatly lessened since Spain has acquired rail communication with Germany.

The food situation in Spain merits further attention. According to a traveller recently returned from Spain, who has written his observations in the *New York Times*, the Spanish wheat crop last summer was a million tons short of normal, and yet considerable quantities are being shipped to Germany. The short crop was due in part to the fact that the food shortage in the preceding year had caused much of the seed wheat to be consumed. The said traveller saw men, women and children sitting in gutters to receive their one meagre meal for the day. Even the known presence of the secret police did not prevent Spaniards from speaking their minds, recklessness being a typically Spanish characteristic. Some expressed the opinion that wheat, meat, potatoes, eggs and olive oil were being shipped to Germany or Italy, leaving Spaniards to starve. Many of the reports received may have been exaggerated, but the opinions voiced are important as a barometer of the popular mind. The fact that Franco has "adopted" ninety destroyed towns for rebuilding according to ambitious plans³ suggests that everything that can possibly be exported will be sent out to pay for the necessary equipment. Such a large-scale programme of

3. See *Life*, Feb. 12, 1940, 65 ff.

reconstruction, moreover, hardly harmonizes with immediate plans for further ventures in destruction.

In consideration of the situation outlined, therefore, we must count Spain as definitely, but superficially, allied to the Axis, with which her ultimate aims are at variance. Though she is anxious for a part in final settlement, Spain's present weakness and vulnerability to sea attack are strong deterrents to belligerency. Should Great Britain begin to totter, however, we might expect Franco to play a part similar to that of Mussolini last June 10, one week before France begged for an armistice. It would be Spain's last chance to snatch something from the defeated "pluto-democracies." An outcome more satisfactory to Franco, however, would be a delayed German-Italian victory, with his own effective coöperation towards the end of the struggle, and with sufficient relative strength to assert his claims. For the time being, his best policy is to concentrate upon building—industries, war equipment, submarines, ships. In this he will have an undeterminable measure of German coöperation. As for open intervention in the war, Franco may be expected to move with caution and time his steps, so far as his strategic genius allows, with Hitlerian accuracy, deferring involvement until the moment that he can serve his own, not his partners', interests. In this policy, however, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for Franco to maintain freedom of action; up to the present there has been no external pressure strong enough to force his hand.

The moral for Great Britain and her sympathizers is obvious. A show of strength, with military, naval and air activity spectacular enough to presage a certain Axis defeat, is the best guarantee of Spain's continued non-belligerency. This strength must grow with sufficient rapidity to render it evident that no weight added by Spain against us could reverse the final decision. Appeasement overtures, on the other hand, are certain to have the same effect with Franco as they have had with his fellow-dictators.