

WHAT WILL SPAIN DO?

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DURING the two years I have spent on this continent, the question "What will Spain do?" has been put to me dozens of times. Numerous articles in American and Canadian publications show how deeply interested, and also how uncertain, are the public about Spain's attitude in the present world conflict. The answers I heard to the question I have indicated were, naturally enough, given from the point of view of Anglo-Saxon interests, or—when they came from Spaniards—showed the bias of party politics. Both these ways of thinking, to my mind, lead one astray—not less than those issuing from interpretations of the Spanish Civil War which still lack even fractional confirmation. On the other hand, before I left Spain I was constantly being asked "How will Germany, and how will England, deal with us?" The answers which such questioners suggested to their own question were prescribed to them by fear, by hope, or by party-political interests.

At that time (summer and autumn of 1940) Spanish public opinion was clear—that with the collapse of France the Axis Powers had already won the war—and it was but natural for certain nationalist groups to think the time thus ripe for proclaiming Spain's demands. To understand Franco's policy towards the present war, it is essential that one begin one's analysis with the situation in the summer and autumn of 1940. The Axis Powers, to whom Franco had owed his victory, were then dominating Europe. England was reeling under terrific onslaughts by air: the Soviet Union still held fast by its bond with Hitler, and in the United States both presidential candidates had pledged themselves to the policy of keeping the country out of the war. At the same time, Falangist pressure upon Franco was intensified, and the student population demonstrated almost every day with the slogan "Gibraltar". On my return to Spain in the early summer of 1940, I found in Barcelona and Madrid, in Salamanca and Malaga, the word "Gibraltar" inscribed on many a building, often with the accompanying claim "Morocco", and most frequently of all with the Falangist battle-cry "Long Live Spain".

To appreciate these emotional outbursts of Spanish youth, one must remember that Spaniards were once the masters of the world, that for centuries Spain held the largest colonial empire, and that to Spanish eyes England and America appear

as the Powers which not only deposed the country from this proud position but also robbed it of its riches overseas. Such reflections are not concerned with what is "mere ancient history". My own father-in-law was an army doctor in Cuba, and my mother-in-law still tells me with bitter resentment of how an American shell struck the bedroom where she was awaiting the birth of her first child. I can well understand how the old lady still feels towards Americans who struck such terror into a young woman at her most critical hour, while her husband was on medical duty in the hospital. Another memory is that of the seizure of the Philippines—within the experience of the older generation of Spaniards. Finally, the Union Jack flying at Gibraltar on the soil of the Spanish peninsula is a thorn in the national pride. Realizing on the one hand these deep feelings of the Spanish people, whose source is in their national history, and on the other the war situation which seemed imminent in the summer and autumn of 1940, we can appreciate how powerful a pressure, how alluring a temptation the Franco Government withstood as it remained firm for Spanish neutrality.

The strongest reasons for remaining neutral were drawn from Spain's economic state and from her internal politics. From the Civil War she carried wounds still unhealed: they were, and they continue, economic wounds. Never shall I forget the unspeakable poverty which on my return I found in all towns, in all neighborhoods, in all ranks. France, then conquered, had still white bread and wine, cheese and vegetables in abundance; but in Spain, formerly so well supplied and with cost of living so low, one could get only wretched black bread, and wine at enormous price, while cheese and vegetables were almost a monopoly of the smuggler. All classes of the population were impoverished; the victorious followers of Franco were scarcely better off than the defeated republicans.

Transport was desperately disorganized, rendering fruitless all the efforts of government or public to meet the crisis by increased production. Naturally in Malaga and Valencia grapes and oranges were available in abundance, but it was impossible to secure carriage for them to Madrid and Barcelona, and just as little could the coal from Asturias reach the central or eastern Spanish provinces. Between the country's two great cities, Madrid and Barcelona, a train ran only three times a week: I had to buy my ticket many days in advance, so that, packed like a sardine in a Civil War railway coach, I might endure the discomfort of an eighteen-hours trip covering only 400 miles.

Needless to say, there was no dining-car; nowhere could refreshments be bought, and dust poured in through the loose window frames. I speak here of the state of things a year and a half after the close of the Civil War: when I left in December, 1940, no improvement was visible.

To make the situation still worse, there came a disastrous shortage of gasoline. By this the system of passenger-bus and road transport for goods, which had developed over the peninsula, was brought practically to a stand-still. Blame fell again upon the English, whose blockade had been made intense. From the English point of view this was seen to be altogether reasonable, but it enraged the neutral Spaniards, just as the German U-boat blockade in 1917 had enraged the neutral Americans. It is not too much to say that Spain is now economically in circumstances not much different from the pressure of Civil War time. Social and internal political circumstances corresponded. The republican currency had been cancelled, with—as a consequence—the rendering of Spain proletarian overnight. The sharp deflation policy adopted by the Franco Government forced the whole working class and the whole middle class to the level of struggle for bare existence. Their miserable wages and salaries became all the more inadequate as prices became harder to regulate, and showed a tendency to conform to those of the "black market". Such sombre economic situation was not calculated to moderate the strains to which the Civil War had given rise. There remains not merely the conflict between Franco's followers and the Republicans, but that also between *Requetes* and *Falangists* in Franco's own camp; that too between Communists and Syndicalists in the camp of the Left. Moderate Republicans had made their peace with the government, at least while under the pressure of overwhelming Axis victories, and have given their cordial support of the neutrality programme.

In the government camp the Falangists were against neutrality, and for a time their leader—Serrano Suner—seemed as Foreign Minister to be counteracting the policies of Franco, his chief. The solid land forces however, who stood behind the *Requetes* and even in the Civil War had made less noise but done more work, proved the stronger. Catholic tradition, and the restoration movement born of this tradition, in these circles gathered strength beyond that of the Falangist ideology whose origin was foreign. The *Requetes* are by no means to be identified with the groups known as Church and Nobility, though these

conservative groups follow in foreign politics the same sort of neutrality course. Rather with the old political Spanish movement called Carlist.

In the camp of the Left the Communists, after the Stalin-Hitler Pact had been completed, made a complete reversal of their policy, and pursued a foreign policy differing very little from that of the Falangists. This was transformed after June 22, 1941: but the Spaniards are far too intelligent to forget so soon the ideological suicide which the Communists had carried out. The non-Communist Republican leaders, who live chiefly abroad, enlist on the other hand the cordial sympathy of their earlier associates, and in all likelihood if Spain had entered the war—on whichever side—the civil strife within would have broken out again in another form. This consideration was plainly most significant for the neutrality programme of Franco, and from the first day after I arrived in this country I have answered my American and Canadian questioners in these terms: "Spain will in all circumstances remain neutral".

It was of great significance that Franco's situation was so clearly understood in British and American official circles, where this understanding found most effective practical expression at the hands of two exceptionally able ambassadors. All the more important when the outbreak between Germany and Russia might well have justified in the eyes of the *Requetes* eventual entrance by Spain into the war! Hostility to Communism is strong throughout Europe, but above all among the Spanish Catholic youth. Again, however, Franco showed that he puts his country's interests higher than any ideological antagonism. In this policy he was without doubt much assisted by the Vatican's restraining influence, as well as by the national transformation of Bolshevism.

The reverses sustained by the Axis Powers in Russia, Egypt and Tunisia made plain to the nationalist youth of Spain how far-sighted had been Franco's programme of neutrality. It was a change in public opinion which counted for all the more when Hitler, after the British-American landings on North Africa, attempted by bribe or by threat to bring Spain into active alliance with the Axis. If he had succeeded in doing so, it would have enabled him to apply his forces, operating from Spanish-Morocco, against the rear of the allied armies in Tunisia. Once more was shown the enormous value of Spain's neutrality for the cause of the Allies. Beyond doubt, Spain counts on this for her future relation to

clear plans. The best indication of their nature is to be seen in the recently cemented treaty of friendship with Portugal, by which these two countries of the Iberian peninsula have notably strengthened their national and their international position. Close cooperation of these two Catholic countries with the Vatican not only conforms to their nature and their tradition, but shows also the larger purpose of their foreign policy: nothing short of the construction of a Latin Catholic bloc of states, to which, besides Portugal and Spain, a new France and an Italy delivered from Fascism would adhere. A bloc which at the same time would work for the best and closest unity with all Catholic nations and peoples of Europe, and indeed of the whole world!

For this Spanish purpose it is of no great importance whether and when the recent widely diffused propaganda for restoration of the monarchy in Spain attains its purpose. My experience tells me that the Spanish people are much less interested than the foreign world in this problem. Spanish people await as fruit of long years of suffering an improvement of their economic situation, a re-birth of their national and religious forces, and they hope from the European reconstruction a re-establishment of Latin greatness.

Here it becomes plain that the question "What will Spain do?" is—for Canada and the United States—a question still more important in regard to the coming peace than in regard to the present war. For those close historical, cultural and religious bonds which connect Spain with the Central and Southern American countries prescribe, as essential to extension and fulfilment of President Roosevelt's "good-neighbor policy", a close friendship between North America and Spain.