

Howard Fast

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Spain and Peace

By Howard Fast

HOW will people describe Spain when the story of our time is told? Are there cold facts, figures, statistics to measure the heart of the Spanish people, to define their passionate love for freedom, to measure their dignity, to weigh their strength? It is such a long time since the Spanish struggle began that sometimes it seems as if all our lives have been lived against the background of their unending resistance. And as so many here in America surrender their consciences, the role of the Spanish people becomes even more glorious and more accusing of those who abandoned them.

Spain fights on, and in those three words there is a miracle. It is my purpose here to tell something

about this miracle and what it means to us; for there is no question but that it has meaning. There is no Spanish worker, professional, intellectual or peasant who strikes a blow for freedom without our being intimately concerned. We must understand this.

On the 12th of March, in 1931, an event occurred in Spain that was without precedent in our era. That is a good point to begin any story about Spain today.

Yet there must be a background.

You cannot simply say that on the 12th of March, 300,000 Spanish workers downed their tools in one of the strangest, most militant and most glorious strikes of modern times. It wasn't simply a strike in the terms we know and understand. It was a strike in a land where strikes had been outlawed for years, a land of terror, fascist dictatorship, a land of the firing squad, the whip and the concentration camp.

Yet in this land for two days and for two nights, beginning in the early morning of March 12th, 300,000 strikers paralysed the industrial and commercial life of Barcelona, Badalona, Sabadel,

Tarrassa, Mataro, Pueblo Nuevo, and other Catalonian cities.

Anyone who has ever participated in a strike knows that such things cannot arise spontaneously. They must be planned, calculated, deliberated upon, organized down to the last detail. How does one plan, deliberate, organize, and lead such a mighty movement as this in a land which has lived under the official hood of fascist darkness for twelve years? The answer is contained in the great heart and soul and the indomitable spirit of the Spanish people.

THE SPANISH PEOPLE AND AMERICA

One cannot write, even in passing, about Spain and the Spanish struggle without linking it with America. There is a mighty interconnection in man's struggle for freedom, a singleness of purpose and endeavor which binds together those who struggle for human liberation, whatever land they live in, whatever tongue they speak, whatever race bears them. But particularly is this true of the Spanish struggle and the place it occupies in the hearts of the American people. The Lincoln Brigade, enlisted here in the United States, and which went to fight on the soil of Spain? so many of them to die on the soil of Spain in the cause of Spanish freedom? was not an accident of history. Quite to the contrary: the Lincoln Brigade was part of the deepest and the most splendid logic of the history of the United States. It was proof apparent and proof absolute that the heritage of American freedom was part of the heritage of all free men, and this proof was spelled out in blood and signed with the death of many gallant young Americans.

There is hardly a town or hamlet in all of our land that did not give one of its sons to this unforgettable group. And when Franco, like a bloated spider who feasts on human blood and human hopes, took over with the aid of Hitler and Mussolini the whole of Spain, the cause of the Spanish people was not forgotten here in America. When the monstrous hoax of "non-intervention" was invented by the governments of the West, including our own, to prevent the Spanish Republic from buying arms to defend itself against this aggression of fascism, the cause of Spain had become woven into the fabric of our lives. It was deeply understood by the simplest and most isolated of Americans? because it was a cause akin to that for which their own ancestors had fought and died in their own struggles for liberation.

In the years that followed, a national organization was created to bring aid and relief to the hundreds of thousands of Spanish fighters, workers and intellectuals and mothers and children too, who had never laid down their arms, never surrendered, but had fled across the Pyrenees into southern France? so that at some future time they might fight again in the cause of freedom. This organization became known as the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, and for a full decade it has occupied a singular and fine place in American history. It was an organization which involved in its work tens of thousands of the best Americans. It built hospitals; it sent an unending flow of medical supplies, food and clothing to the Spanish Republican exiles. But more importantly even than these very important things, it has kept alive in the hearts of the American people the glory and the wonder of Spanish resistance to tyranny.

For many years I had the honor to be associated with the executive board of this committee. To them as to me, it was no surprise when in 1946 the Government instituted its present terror with an attack against the board members of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee. In the years that followed, our case became internationally known, and many thousands of the American people came to our support. In spite of this, we were sentenced to prison; and thirteen of us served prison terms because we had persisted in the cause of Spain's freedom.

I mention this in terms of the continuity I spoke of before. The Spanish struggle and the American struggle are inseparable. Since the first moves of the House Committee on Un-American Activities against the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, a whole series of actions?

calculated actions?have been instituted by the Truman government to build and cement an alliance between Franco Spain and the United States of America.

Today as I write, this alliance is quite complete. American military and economic missions are swarming all over Spain, checking on bases, reviewing Falangist troop maneuvers, studying plants, mines, statistics. Airfields have been built in every corner of the land and ports on all coasts have been widened and modernised?under U.S. military direction. American money pours into Spain in an endless stream so that Franco and his satraps may live in ease and comfort, regardless of how their people suffer. And through the less direct labyrinth of high finance, American corporations have won commanding positions in the Spanish fields of petroleum, the production and distribution of electric power, the communications and transportation systems and the production of strategic metals?tungsten, zinc, wolfram, mercury and aluminum. Before World War II the Nazis controlled the chemical, pharmaceutical and metallurgical industries of Spain; today control of these industries has passed to their conquerors, the Americans. Slowly, the British and French beneficiaries of the Marshall Plan are being pushed out of their monopolist positions in Spain.

Today the American people are told that this unspeakable, and once unthinkable, alliance is for the benefit of America. Today the American people are assured that turning Franco Spain into one vast fortress is a defense against war; that Franco, the vile creature of fascism who knows only how to war against his people and their freedoms, has become a custodian of world peace.

Twelve years, however, is not long enough for the American people to forget. The butcher Franco survived his two allies, Hitler and Mussolini, but who can forget the aid and comfort he gave them during the second world war when the Spanish Blue Division fought in the ranks of the Nazi army? Who can forget how he was the eyes and ears of the Nazi Luftwaffe and submarines that sank our ships and our men in the Mediterranean, or how he supplied the Nazi war machine with vital materials during history's greatest war? The memories of men are not so short.

When Spain's despot is enlisted to aid our country defend freedom in the fastnesses of the Pyrenees, we must ask, insistently and endlessly, what kind of freedom and for whom? For our own sake, we must know with certainty the aim of this American scheme to outdo the British and make of all Spain a Gibraltar. We must know why Franco is so accommodating and why Washington is so willing to "let bygones be bygones."

The Spanish people are not disposed to let bygones be bygones. A cry of pain, a cry of suffering comes unbearably from the Spanish soil. But above it comes a fierce shout of resistance, and we would be fools and traitors to the cause of human freedom if we did not hear this too.

A LAND OF MISERY AND POVERTY

What is the situation in Spain itself? It is important that we know, for the truth of Spain is the most naked truth in all the world, and Spanish fascism is the symbol of fascism everywhere. The story of the Spanish struggle thereby becomes a symbolic story for all people who hate fascism and love freedom.

I spoke before of the great general strike that began in Barcelona and spread from there to the other important cities in Spain. This strike was touched off by a streetcar fare increase in Barcelona. But behind that are many years of slow starvation and indescribable misery. Poverty in Spain has been cumulative, and not only is the poverty of the average Spaniard greater, but there are more poor, proportionately, in Spain than in any other European country. This is the result of 12 years of looting on the part of Franco and his henchmen. The damage of their bombs during the civil war has not been repaired even to this day. There are not enough hospitals in

Spain even for one-tenth of its population. The rate of tuberculosis is the highest, and illiteracy is more prevalent than anywhere in Europe.

Travelers in Spain are at a loss to describe the misery and the suffering of the people. Two-thirds of the Spanish population has neither plumbing nor electricity. And in many parts of Spain, children are denied even the most minimum clothing.

In Barcelona, for example, an unskilled worker pays half of his day's wages for a loaf of bread. To buy two pounds of average beef he must work 14 hours, but since meat can be bought only in the black market, it is beyond the reach of most Spaniards. The official prices quoted by the government have gone up 700 per cent since 1945, and had already gone up perhaps as much as that during the war years; for the black market prices, you can double the quoted one. After 12 years of fascist rule, the Spanish people still live under a system of food rationing, including bread, that sanctifies starvation.

During the early years of his regime, Franco waged a savage campaign to smash the working class of Spain and its organizations. There was never a day, never a night when the firing squad was not active somewhere in Spain. The best and the finest leaders of the Spanish working class were driven into exile or put to death. At one point some five years ago, there were literally hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants in the jails and concentration camps of Spain. Free trade unions became unlawful, strikes were outlawed, membership in all opposition political parties and the Masonic Order was punishable by death, and the public practice of religion, other than Catholic, was forbidden.

Within this context one understands that the Spanish struggle is a miracle of human resistance and valor. The horror of Spain and the bestiality of Franco become a background for the courage and glory of the Spanish people.

Four years before, on May 1, 1947, a strike was called in Bilbao which involved 50,000 workers. This strike was crushed with the fiercest repressive measures, and dozens of the workers involved were put to death. But the lessons of this strike were carefully learned. While the workers faced torture and firing squads, the guerrilla movement in other sections of the country struck again and again at the Franco civil guards.

Bit by bit the partisan bands in the countryside, in the mountains, increased their strength. For the next two years Spanish partisan groups carried out raids in Galicia, Extremadura, Andalusia, Santander, Valencia and Catalonia.

In the cities, the workers set out to build a solid front which would include every section of the Spanish population except those within the Franco dictatorship. At the end of 1949 more than 3,000 taxi drivers in Madrid went on strike. During the 12 months preceding the great general strike of Barcelona, small, isolated strikes broke out in city after city throughout Spain.

The Barcelona general strike began with a boycott of streetcars, an action that forced cancellation of the fare increase. On underground presses, tens of thousands of leaflets were printed and distributed. Posters denouncing the Franco regime appeared on walls all over the city.

Patently, tirelessly, the united front had been welded together. It included students, intellectuals, professionals, shopkeepers, and small business men?grouped around the core of workers. After four years of work and preparation, the Spanish people were ready to engage in the mighty demonstration of March, 1951.

THE GENERAL STRIKE MOVEMENT

Consider that even in those countries where trade unions are legal and have the fullest freedom of operation, a general strike is the most difficult operation for workers to carry through.

Nevertheless, all accounts of the great general strike movement of 1951 in Spain agree that it was complete from the start. The machinery of life ground to a halt. The Catalonian people went out on the streets.

But the morning of the second day after the strike had started, Franco began to mobilise. Four warships arrived in the Barcelona harbor, landing marines to reinforce the police and the elite civil guards. Three thousand civil guards were brought in by train from Madrid. Five thousand additional police and troops had already been brought into the city during the streetcar boycott. Barcelona was an armed camp. Everywhere were troops, bayonets, guns, armored cars.

Thousands of strikers were arrested. Some of them, suspected of being key leaders, were put to torture. Corrupt and renegade fascist trade union leaders warned employers that if any workers on strike were paid, the employer would be punished. The fascist government instructed employers that any striker arrested must be immediately discharged.

For all of this, the strike held firm and ended as it had begun—with discipline, with order and with firmness. On Wednesday, the third day, the workers began to return to work. They had carried through successfully their greatest demonstration of strength and unity since 1939. They had maintained a united front with almost every section of the population, and they had demonstrated to the rest of Spain that it is possible, even under fascist terror, to fight against Franco. The mobilisation had been so powerful and so massive that the threats and the reprisals were nullified. Virtually all prisoners were released, the strikers kept their jobs and won pay for the time on strike.

They had put forth their demands and made all Spain aware of them. Cheaper food and clothing were the main basis of their demands. But beyond that they never allowed themselves to be diverted from their purpose of uniting the Spanish people against the Franco dictatorship. Showers of leaflets fell, even on the helmets of the guards patrolling Plaza Catalonia. The leaflets appealed to the police and soldiers, telling them, "You are all sons of the people. Fraternize with your brothers. Don't be partners of the hangmen. Down with the murderers! Long live the Republic!" This was the great Barcelona strike that set off the wave of general strikes and demonstrations in the next two months.

On April 23rd, more than 250,000 seasoned workers in the Bilbao area shut down this great industrial port for the same ominous 48 hours; the arms plants, the metal factories, the iron and steel mills, the textile plants ground to a halt. From Guipuzcoa to Alava to Navarre—from one end of the Basque provinces to the other, the weeks that followed were in the same pattern. And everywhere there was the same widespread support.

In Pamplona, the strikers stormed the Falange party headquarters. In Tolosa, the women marched through the streets holding aloft empty bottles of olive oil to display not only their hunger but their will to struggle. And in Madrid, on May 22nd, the nerve-center of the fascist regime, the trolleys, the trains, the buses and the taxis rode empty. The people of Madrid struck with their feet, walking to work and walking home from work. It was a boycott demonstration against which all the ruthless display of Franco was powerless to act.

Here was the challenge of more than a million and a half people of Spain, a challenge more acute than Franco had ever faced. And it was not the end; clearly it was only the beginning. Franco was not alone in concern over his fate. Those who would present Franco as a reliable ally were concerned, too. Indeed there are some who say that the flight to Madrid of the late Admiral Sherman, representing the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, was hastened by the need to mend the fortunes of the Spanish dictator. And the Madrid announcement of a U.S. military pact with the Caudillo was made on the very anniversary—the fifteenth—of the start of the fascist revolt against the Republic. Franco had been handed another victory in the nick of time.

TERROR, PRISON AND EXILE

Yet the Barcelona story is only one side of the Spanish story. It is easy to fall into a mood of apathy and say, "Yes, the Spanish people are a great people. They will conquer this thing themselves."

There would be warrant enough for this feeling. The Spanish people have long since seen washed away that shining, World War II pledge of the Western powers to wipe out the last vestiges of fascism. They watched the victorious men gather in San Francisco to build the same United Nations coalition for peace that had proved so powerful in war. When that session ended, one of the first entries on the UN books was a condemnation of Franco "as a fascist regime, patterned on, and established largely as a result of aid received from Hitler's Nazi Germany and Mussolini's fascist Italy." That was in 1945, and a year later a diplomatic ban was imposed on Franco Spain. But this was the limit of righteous distaste President Truman would permit, and from which he has ever since retreated. Year by year, the deference to anti-fascist sentiment yielded to the design of the cold war. In 1948 the U.S. began campaigning for repeal of the ban. In 1949, to hasten the campaign, the U.S. delegation introduced the gentle art of "arm-twisting" into the General Assembly, and in November, 1950, the art bore fruit. The ban against Franco was lifted and Washington was the first of the major powers of the West to return an ambassador to Franco's Madrid.

The people of Spain were on their own, their bright hopes in the UN coalition gone. In Barcelona, 300,000 Spanish workers, made strong by their disillusion, began the march back.

But we live in a world today where no man and no country can exist as an island. The Spanish people struggle for all that is best and finest in our world, and against all that is vile and destructive. Do you imagine that the price of such a struggle is a small one?

Suppose we take the experiences of one month in a few areas of Spain simply in terms of peasant resistance. From Franco sources, published during the month of December, 1949, we learn that in Levante, seven peasants were arrested by civil guards. Two of them were assassinated in that time-honored fascist manner, "shot while trying to escape." We learn that in the first part of November, mass arrests were carried out. Dozens of peasants suffered brutal tortures. In the course of these tortures many were killed. The official reports include 12 who died in this manner.

We find that on October 15th, a peasant was killed by civil guards on the outskirts of Ejulve. We discover that during October, in Andalucia, a number of peasants were arrested, accused of aiding guerrillas. One of them was transshipped by train. He was murdered while "trying to escape." On November 13th, two peasants were killed while "trying to escape" near Villa del Rio. On November 17th, Francisco Lopez Pinto was killed, murdered by Franco's police. On the same day, also in Andalucia, Francisco Arroyo Aguilar was killed.

This is a very incomplete report. It deals with only a few areas of Spain, and it is gleaned from Franco sources. The full record makes one wonder how any people can be bled in this fashion and yet continue to resist. For example, we have these statistics, from Franco sources, of anti-fascists murdered during a four-year period?shot either by order of military tribunals, or while "trying to escape": in 1945, 590; in 1946, 160; in 1947, 562; and in 1948, 300. In 1950 we had reliable information concerning 200,000 political prisoners held in prisons and in 16 concentration camps. Of this number, 22,000 were women, and in the camps were many thousands of children born in prison or concentration camp, who had reached the ages of six, seven and eight and had known no other life.

Such is the land of Franco, and such is the cross which the Spanish people bear. Such too is the ally, the "noble" ally, which our foreign policy has chosen to defend the American way of life

and to help keep the peace throughout the world. We have allied ourselves with a regime which has driven into exile almost half a million workers, over 2,000 teachers, 350 doctors, 350 professors, 100 writers and poets, 50 scientists, composers, sculptors, artists, painters.

How often do we read in our press of the "free world" which we are defending! I have told you something about the part of the "free world" which exists under the enlightened rule of Francisco Franco. How would you like to live there? How would it feel? It has been said by many a whimpering German that he or she knew nothing of the death camps. But there is no human being in Spain who does not know the details of the hell on earth Francisco Franco, with the help of Hitler and Mussolini, has created and which now Truman and Acheson help perpetuate.

Of 3,700,000 farm workers and peasants in Spain, according to Franco's own statistics, only 500,000 are more or less steadily employed. The rest, seasonal workers employed a few months each year, live on roots and wild plants and whatever else they can find to fill their aching bellies. The 500,000 work for the two per cent of Spanish landlords who possess 60 per cent of all arable land. Most of the remaining arable land is controlled by the Catholic Church.

Here is a land which has the highest infant mortality rate in Europe. Here is a land where 75 per cent of all children suffer from tuberculosis. In this land, on the outskirts of Madrid, 400,000 people live literally in caves and mud huts. In Barcelona almost 150,000 live in caves, and it is estimated that six million people have no place to live but the open fields, the streets or the bitter protection of archways and bridges.

The monsters who made this are now our ally. With this evil our government has joined forces, so that we may carry on a crusade against Communism, the same "crusade" that Francisco Franco proclaimed in 1936.

A CENTER OF WORLD STRATEGY

The Spanish struggle is not always dramatic. It is not easy to be dramatic in a land ruled by hangmen and murderers, but the struggle is continuous and unending.

Can we separate ourselves from this struggle? Can we ignore the new era of struggle that the general strikes in the spring of 1951 have ushered in? I don't think so. For once again, as in 1936, Spain has become a center in the strategy of world war or world peace. Once again aid goes to Franco and a policy of "non-intervention" is imposed upon the democratic forces of Spain. Once again the plea is made that this is the way to prevent a world war and strengthen the forces of peace.

But this time there is a greater peril for the American people. Each day, inside Spain, there is less and less bewilderment about the sudden way in which the Stars and Stripes has appeared to rescue their tyrant from doom. The Spanish people may be told that this is all for their own good and ours. But one must face it: it's an impossible task to convince them. All they can see is intervention to strengthen their oppressor. The modern "Made in U.S.A." weapons for Franco's Falangist army won't bring any closer to Spaniards the freedom to speak, to worship, to assemble or to organize into free trade unions. The naval and air bases soon to fly the American flag will lend no peaceful aspect to the Spanish landscape. Neither will these things nourish in the hearts of the people of Spain a pride in the proud possession of their own land.

The bitter truth they are learning is that these are steps to war, just as surely as they know that the despotism against which they fight is a system based wholly on warring against their living standards, their right to be free and to live in peace with the other peoples of the world. The people of Europe? East and West? know this too. This is why the Truman policy of arming and aiding Franco is meeting the bitterest opposition of the people of France, England, Italy, Belgium. They know that propping up fascist dictators? anywhere? brings war closer to them. They also

have learned the lesson of American support to Chiang Kai-shek, which has produced not peace but war, not friendship but the hostility of the people of an entire continent.

These truths are matters of life or death for the American people as well. Hysteria and hypnosis lie heavily on our people today; revulsion against the once unthinkable alliance with Franco is stilled, and admiration for Spain's noble struggle becomes a forlorn secret in the corner of the mind. The slyly planted notion grows that Franco fascism, standing guard in the Pyrenees, can in some mysterious, satanic fashion prevent war's horror from reaching our shores and exhaust the terror of atom bombs before they obliterate our own cities and people. This is the great, cruel fraud of our day.

Building fortresses for fascism in Spain, or anywhere else, is an invitation to bring war upon ourselves. It can never be otherwise and neither can the nature of fascism be otherwise. And an alliance with fascism increases the danger of contamination. Has some special dispensation made our people and our land immune from this danger of contagion? Indeed, it could be argued that the danger is already upon us. The price of dissent is even now too high for some Americans. It is a fact of history that Senator McCarran, the most ardent advocate of a Franco alliance, is author of the Internal Security Act which establishes a rule of political orthodoxy entirely alien to America's democratic traditions, but congenial to fascism.

War or peace, freedom or fascist tyranny? these can no longer be decided separately by the American people and the people of Spain. We must understand in the fullest sense that if the cause of Spain goes down, the cause of America goes down with it.

THE ALLIANCE MUST BE BROKEN

When one looks back over the years upon the Spanish suffering, one can think only of a mighty passion, the responsibility for which no man on earth can deny or avoid. Long, long ago, so long ago that it seems to have been in another world and another life, American troops fighting in the suburbs of Madrid called out a brave, proud slogan:

"Madrid," they said, "will be the tomb of fascism."

In its own awful and ironic way, history has given substance and meaning and historic truth to their words. Madrid can and must be the tomb of fascism, for unless Spanish fascism is destroyed, this malignant seed will destroy us. As Americans we must each of us, singly and with grave conscience, bear the responsibility for the bloody and immoral compact which our government has made with the butcher Franco. We have no choice concerning this compact. It must be denounced and broken, or else it will surely destroy us.

It is 12 years since the Spanish Republic fell. But the cause of Spain has not become a lost cause. It can never become a lost cause so long as the people of Spain continue to struggle and so long as Americans cherish freedom and honor democracy and strive to live in a world at peace.



An Appeal to Readers...

For 16 years the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee and its predecessor organisations have carried on a tradition of support for the cause of democratic Spain. It has provided aid for the exiled victims of the Franco regime. It has ceaselessly espoused a public policy that would place our government on the side of the heroic Spanish people.

Today, the greatest contribution Americans can make toward the cause of the Spanish people, victimised equally in exile and inside Spain, is to prevent the realization of a military and economic pact with their oppressor, Franco.

We urge every reader of this pamphlet to protest to the President, to the State Department, and to members of Congress.

Arming Franco will bolster his despotic, insecure rule, and will hasten us down the road to war. Opposing a Franco alliance is not a matter of decency and conscience alone; our basic self interest demands it.

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Please send me regularly your bulletin FREE SPAIN, reporting and analysing current developments in Spain and U.S.-Spanish relations.

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