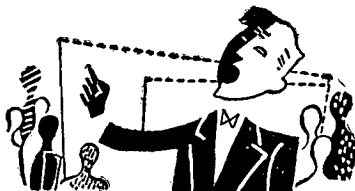

THE OPEN FORUM



FRANCO'S SPAIN — SECOND ROUND

SIR: Your article, "Franco's Spain" [by Melanie L. Pflaum], published in your January issue, forces me, out of respect for you and loyalty to your readers, to answer an article based upon unfounded and undocumented sources. . . .

Let us start with the statement of one "Miguel," who, it appears, is a chemistry professor. We are not informed whether he is a high school or university professor. Only that "he earns the same salary he earned seven years ago. His expenses have risen 500 to 600 per cent." Both statements are untrue. According to the Government budget and teaching appropriations, if he is a university professor his basic salary was 8000 pesetas in 1935. It is now 12,000 pesetas (since 1942). If he is a high school teacher, his basic salary was 5000 pesetas in 1936 and is at present 10,000 pesetas (since 1944). *Fascism In Action* (p. 158) gives the April 1947 cost of living (approximately the time Mrs. Pflaum was in Spain) as from three to four times prewar levels. The salary figures I have given also disprove her statement that "university professors are worse off than secondary school teachers, who are well paid and well treated." Remember also that traditionally, professors lecture one or two hours a day and are able to triple or quadruple their official income by the lucrative practice of their specialized knowledge. The writer, a high school professor in Madrid, who does not belong to the Falange, has decently supported a family of four by more work in the open market.

Mrs. Pflaum's partiality has blinded her to a reality not limited to Spain. A survey of the American teaching problem by the New York Times published in 1947, shows "that 350,000 teachers left the schools since 1940 and that the morale of the Nation's teachers was never lower." As a Spanish professor, I should add, neither is this an exception, for it is a world condition due

to the teacher's greater interest in his vocation than in his financial interests.

"We are falling so far behind the rest of the world," adds this curious Miguel, "it will take a century to catch up." Neither he nor Mrs. Pflaum has seen the statement appearing in the New York Times, July 31, 1947: "Sister Elizabeth Kenny, widely known for her controversial system for treating poliomyelitis, declared that infantile paralysis research in Spain was far ahead of that in other countries including the United States." Spain does not claim to be as far ahead in all fields; she may lag in some, but in many others bears comparison with the best.

Mrs. Pflaum continues: "They checked official statistics on public health and discovered that physicians had learned not to give starvation as the cause of death, but to list secondary causes, such as tuberculosis or anemia." The implications in this statement are gratuitous. It is curious to compare this with the statement of Dr. Francisco Blanco Rodriguez, in *La Lucha Antituberculosa en España*, Madrid, 1945, page 96, on considering errors in diagnosis: "There are undoubtedly medical errors, but this inevitable fact does not amount to much, because the diagnosis of consumption in an advanced stage is accessible even to the layman. On the other hand, the deliberately falsified certificates are surely more important. In the rural zones of our country, tuberculosis is considered a degrading disease, and those doctors who have sentimental or economic ties with the patients' families are asked to dissemble the true diagnosis." This honest and plain-speaking statement is precisely contradictory with Mrs. Pflaum's assertions. Apart from this, how does Sr. Miguel reconcile the statement on hunger with the fact that the nation's health, instead of weakening presents symptoms of betterment? Here are some facts: death

by tuberculosis was 12.9 per 10,000 in 1938; in 1942, it was 12.3. Spain's population was 25 million in 1936; it is now 28 million. According to the *Stateman's Year Book* for 1946, the surplus, of births over deaths was: 149,374 in 1942; 254,264 in 1943; and 253,124 in 1944.

Mrs. Pflaum adds: "Most of the best professors in history, literature, political science and biology are in exile, teaching in Mexico and South America." Let her explain then the presence in Spain of Ortega y Gasset, Unamuno and Zubiri (philosophers), Maranon (biologist), Asin Palacios and Garcia Gomez (Arabists), Menendez Pidal and Damaso Alonso (philologists), Ballesteros Beretta and Pio Zabala (historians), Benavente (Nobel Prize), Ramon Perez de Ayala (Republican Ambassador in London and novelist), Felipe Clemente de Diego (civil law), la Cierva (inventor of the autogiro), Rey Pastor (mathematician), P. Rodes (astronomist), etc. These are names well known abroad. I do not know the names of the persons to whom she refers as celebrities in biology and political science, but were they produced they could be challenged by a numerous staff of Spanish scientists working in our Universities. The Higher Council for Scientific Research alone stimulates scientific investigation to a degree totally unknown before the Civil War. The expenses devoted to scientific research in 1940 were 4 million pesetas; in 1945, 36 million pesetas; and in 1948, 49 million pesetas.

The second source of information used by Mrs. Pflaum is a certain Ramon, who is supposed to be "a civil-servant with a salary of 900 pesetas monthly." She tells us he "gives French lessons, is a night watchman in the ministry where he works by day and makes tooled leather purses and belts for novelty shops." All possible, but not probable. He must be a "man of iron" because he apparently gets no time to sleep. However, Spanish men must be strong and wonderful, for Mrs. Pflaum says of Ramon: "tall, blond and handsome." He likes tall stories, also, for he told Mrs. Pflaum: "Falangists doing the same work get 4000 with bonuses" instead of his own 900 pesetas. Not even a Minister of State gets that much and the highest paid Falangist (National Delegates) earn 25,000 a year.

The Spanish Army comes in for an attack: "A Spanish businessman can succeed by taking in a colonel as a partner. Then he doesn't pay taxes, and he can ignore a thousand petty regulations." Mrs. Pflaum has never heard of the law of March 14, 1942, expressly forbidding Army officers from being gainfully employed while on the active lists. This is no dead letter law, for the *Boletin Oficial* publishes frequently the names of

officers who have left the active lists to take up a business post. The first of these was a Lieut.-Colonel Julian Troncoso, well known to foreign journalists covering the Civil War.

Speaking of the benefits of Social Security, she states: "but no one gets them except the politicians and officers." Persons under benefit in Social Insurance amounted to 4,573,987 in January 1946. The real beneficiaries of Social Insurance in Spain in 1947 were 11,488,964. . . . The difference between the amounts paid until 1935 and the amounts paid thereafter until December 1945 were the following: Until December 31, 1935, 162,938,824.51 pesetas. Until December 31, 1945, 4,209,287,749.32 pesetas.

"Carlitos" is Mrs. Pflaum's last informant. "He was once a famous Madrid journalist," she says of him. "He is now a shoe manufacturer in Seville." It is rather surprising that even if he should be barred from writing (which I refuse to believe until Mrs. Pflaum gives us his name), such a remarkable journalist should not work for what she calls "underground newspapers." Should "these papers have larger circulations than the regular press" (which is materially impossible), it proves one of two things: Carlitos is not so hot as a journalist or the "underground newspapers" cannot pay him for his wares. If the last be true, the financial standing of the papers is not great and the circulation attributed to them by Mrs. Pflaum is absolutely incorrect.

These are the most salient points and should be taken into consideration only for the purpose of refuting again the common errors which are written about Spain. . . .

MANUEL MAESTRO

*Press Attaché, Spanish Embassy
Washington, D. C.*

SIR: I am not convinced by Señor Maestro's statistics. I maintain the official statistics are compounded of fact and fantasy, whereas Señor Maestro accepts them as reality.

The New York *Times* (correspondent Samuel Pope Brewer), the Associated Press (correspondent Robert Okin) and the Chicago *Tribune* dispatches have repeatedly questioned the reality of "official" Spanish statistics and of the practical application of the excellent labor and social security laws now existing in Spain. So does Lord Templewood (Sir Samuel Hoare), former British ambassador to Spain. And so do Thomas Hamilton (New York *Times* correspondent and author of *Appeasement's Child*) and Emmet John Hughes (*Time* Magazine correspondent and author of *Report from Spain*).

On paper, the Soviet Union is a democracy.

The Russian constitution is an exemplary document, and Communists could point to it and say: "Look, what are you talking about? We have the most liberal constitution in the world." The same thing is true, though to a much less extent, in Spain. On paper, there are fine laws, but no one with a knowledge of Spanish could travel in Spain today and not discover the gap between what is supposed to be and what is. There is an appalling amount of corruption. Even groups which were considered incorruptible — the Civil Guards, to name one that was feared and respected — now have their price. Formerly, getting a railroad or airplane ticket meant going where it was sold and buying it. Not today. If you want a reservation on a plane or sleeping car accommodations, you bribe someone. You do the same thing to go to get a good seat at the theatre. Times are hard, people say, and one must live. To travel in Spain today is like being in the Balkans. And while it would be absurd to blame this change entirely upon the present régime, the utter cynicism of many members of the government has affected all classes. "You know what the Falangist salute is?" a Madrid shopkeeper asked me. To demonstrate, he held his right hand up in front of him, and his left hand opened behind his back (for the bribe).

Señor Maestro is probably right in saying that my friends exaggerated or dramatized their situations. We all do that, especially to people whom we haven't seen for a long time, but I believe that their stories were essentially true because they were confirmed by others. But his reasoning eludes me at times. He says either Carlitos wasn't a very good journalist in the first place or he *would be writing for the underground press* (certainly a tacit admission of the existence and importance of that press) — or that these papers cannot pay him for his wares and hence "the financial standing of the papers is not great and the circulation attributed to them by Mrs. Pflaum is absolutely incorrect."

Really, Señor Maestro, you know better than that. The men who write for the underground newspapers don't get paid. They risk their necks, their lives and the security of their families — no amount of money could compensate them adequately for that risk — because of their ideals. Talking about the "financial standing" of an underground paper and judging its circulation accordingly — you must be joking! For the subscribers, too, are taking a considerable chance; money is the least payment that they make for these newspapers. Besides, Carlitos is well-to-do, and, for all I know, he, too, writes for the underground papers and maybe helps to

support them. As to the fact of whether or not former newsmen (except those of the extremely rightist press and even some of these) have been barred from employment or kept out of the sindicato of journalists, just a list of the reporters formerly employed in Madrid will answer that: where are they now? Certainly not writing in the official newspapers.

Señor Maestro says I should give him the names of my journalist friends who have gone into other businesses, having been barred from their profession. You'd like that list, Señor, wouldn't you?

To return to the fabulous statistics. Señor Maestro, quoting Dr. Blanco Rodríguez, says that as tuberculosis is considered degrading, statistics on death from tuberculosis are falsified, and then proceeds to show how tuberculosis as a cause of death has fallen from 12.9 to 12.3! And the birth rate — even the surplus of births over deaths — is rising (as it is in postwar Germany, certainly no paradise). No doubt it is. Nor did I say that starvation prevailed in Spain; I said some provinces were badly off (as they have always been). My point was that the middle class (which is so small that it would not affect national statistics, even accurate ones) is faring badly under the present régime.

Now about those prices. Official figures are meaningless because you can't get the commodities, except at fabulous prices — *estraperlo*. This fact is substantiated by the figures for Spain given by the United States Department of Commerce, gathered by our consulates. Such things as olive oil, rice, codfish — important items on the *Madridleños'* table — must be bought at black market prices; further, substitutes (such as honey for sugar, lard for olive oil) are equally high. When I was in Madrid before the Civil War, I paid five pesetas for my small son's shoes. They are advertised in the same shop today — forty pesetas. I could feed my family for five pesetas a day; now the same food, if it could be obtained, would cost at least thirty pesetas. This same proportion holds true for restaurants, for clothing — for almost everything except rentals, which have been fixed. Actually, I don't think that the high cost of living is entirely the fault of the Franco régime; it is the result of the present economic plight of Europe. It would probably be the same under a Republic. But if anything, I erred on the conservative side in giving living costs.

As to army officers in business. Generals, even colonels, have sons-in-law, nephews who are given highly paid jobs because *tío* José, el general, is a big-shot. So *tío* José is interested in the business and helps the owner along with his problems —

problems like taxes. In return he gets some shares of the business. Franco didn't invent the system; he's only perpetuating it.

O. K., Señor Maestro, Spain under Franco is wonderful — for tourists. And American bankers will probably grant that two hundred million dollar loan for Spanish business, with the approval of our government. What more do you want?

MELANIE L. PFLAUM

Evanson, Ill.

THE TRUTH ABOUT GEORGIA

SIR: Having sprung from the red hills of Georgia, I should like to speak my little "piece" concerning the article "The State of Georgia," by Wenzell Brown, who appears to have obtained his information while teaching English to the Chinese. [See the December 1947 *MERCURY*.] . . .

Mr. Brown does not say it in plain words, perhaps because he is an English teacher, but he hints very strongly at the low state of culture in Georgia. That is common practice of our brothers in the fringe section of the United States. But I should like to emphasize to Mr. Brown that I am willing to match my miles of travel against his, and I have found people pretty much alike.

He indicates that he would bankrupt the movie people by forcing on Georgians motion pictures they do not like. Does he not know that cowboys themselves go to see the Western movies?

Doesn't he know who reads the funnies and the true confession magazines? All he saw in drug stores in Georgia towns were comics and true confession magazines. Wonder if he ever looked on the drug store newsstands in any other sections of the country?

He would have been far better off had he taken time out to read some true detective magazine concerning the lynching of Leo M. Frank. It is indelibly printed upon my mind from boyhood. Mr. Brown states that Frank was convicted and sentenced to life on very slender evidence. Did he go back and read the case? The star witness was a Negro, mark that! This Negro testified that he was directed by Frank to dispose of the body of little Mary Fagan, a thirteen-year-old pencil factory worker, by burning in the factory furnace.

I feel that Frank's being a Jew had nothing to do with his being lynched. He was lynched because the people were enraged. If I remember correctly, Frank was sentenced to die. The governor at that time commuted his sentence to life. The governor had to leave the state temporarily because of his action.

Leo M. Frank, who was superintendent of the pencil factory and not a merchant, as Mr. Brown states, was not lynched by the type of persons who go to Western movies and read the funnies. Many limousines lined the road at the cemetery, where Frank was hanged over the grave of Mary Fagan.

Tom Watson wasn't altogether to blame for Frank's death. Nor did Watson die a short time after that. He lived until 1922. During World War I, he published a paper against the draft. His paper was suppressed. He didn't run for President in 1892, either. He ran for President in 1904. . . .

JOHN BUNYAN ATKINS

Birmingham, Ala.

SIR: Mr. Atkins states, "Many limousines lined the road at the cemetery where Frank was hanged." What is his point? Do limousines provide an air of respectability to a lynching? Or is he trying to prove that "Georgia's best" indulge in lynching? Few Georgians would like to concur in such a view.

Concerning Mr. Atkins' statement that "Frank's being a Jew had nothing to do with his being lynched": he should examine some of the papers distributed by Watson and others at the time. Here is a typical quote: "Frank belonged to the Jewish aristocracy and it was determined by the rich Jews that no aristocrat of their race should die for the death of a working-class Gentile."

Mr. Atkins questioned my dates but did not check the article. My own statement was that "He (Watson) reached the peak of his popularity in the United States Presidential campaign of 1892." True, he tried again in 1904 but obtained only a scattering of votes.

Mr. Atkins' display of prejudices, his seeming defense of lynching and other attitudes, typify the reaction of a group in the South. Yet I believe that such attitudes are on the decline. My own presentation of Georgia I believe to be far more humane than the impression one obtains from reading Mr. Atkins' letter.

WENZELL BROWN

New York City

CATHOLICS, PROTESTANTS AND COMMUNISTS

SIR: The article, "The Catholic-Protestant Feud," by the Reverend Alon J. Smith, in the November 1947 *AMERICAN MERCURY*, is surprisingly sensible, considering that it is written by a

churchman. It is only to be deplored that the day has not yet arrived when man has ceased to feel the need for the crutch that is religion and thereby cast off his grievous burden. That burden being the parasite that is the church, under whatever name it may parade.

All so-called Christian churches have progressively grown away from true Christianity since the death of Christ. Considered as a philosophy, Christ's teachings had their merits. But they presupposed a society in which everyone was equal in the sense that all should give up all possessions, thus winding up in a state of universal poverty. A condition which, of course, is unattainable, human nature being what it is.

Since modern churches are Christian only in name, I see no point in all this triangular fight amongst Catholics, Protestants and (*sic*) Communists. It makes no difference whether one worships the state as a god or worships some mythical being called God. The end of either worship is the aggrandizement of a small minority at the expense of the majority, which is enslaved either mentally or physically, or both. One had just as well take up Voodooism. He couldn't get a worse headache.

I'd suggest that all churches quietly fold up and leave the care of those who feel the need of psychic support to the psychoanalysts. They'd have some chance of recovery then.

LV L. MILLER

Salem, Ore.

A NOTE ON MR. WOLFE'S REVIEWS

SIR: I would like to express my commendation of the extremely fine review of the book, *I Want to Be Like Stalin*, which was written by Bertram D. Wolfe for the January *MERCURY*. I have since read the book and consider Wolfe's review a model of critical appraisal and exposition. It is, in fact, a masterly essay on the totalitarian, reactionary and jingoistic character of Stalinist education. Not only in this review, but in his discussions of *Thunder out of China*, Dallin and Nicolaevsky's *Forced Labor in Soviet Russia*, Ypsilon's *Pattern for World Revolution* and Toynbee's *Study of History*, Wolfe has displayed a keenness of understanding, a comprehensive knowledge of the great variety of subjects dealt with and a lucidity of style quite unmatched by anything in periodical literature in this country in the past year. . . .

BERNARD HERMAN

Forest Hills, N. Y.

REJECTION SLIPS

SIR: Reading in the March "Soap Box" your humorous comment on some of the stories you've received from various "budding authors" recalled to my mind one of the best rejection-slip stories I've ever heard, and since it concerned *THE AMERICAN MERCURY* I'd like to tell it to you.

Twenty years ago, when H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan were joint editors of the *MERCURY*, I had a young friend with literary ambitions. She was not content to begin with the pulps or slicks: as soon as she'd left college she set her sights for the *MERCURY*. She realized, of course, that she might have difficulty breaking into the magazine, so she decided on a private publicity campaign of her own. Every day for a week, before she submitted her first brain child, she sent a post card to the *MERCURY* office; bearing in large print the words *IT IS COMING*.

After she sent the story in she heard nothing for several weeks, and jumped to the conclusion that the editors must have liked it. But one day she received a large card from the *MERCURY*, saying, *IT IS COMING — BACK*. The next day she got her manuscript with a rejection slip.

HARRIET METZNER

New York City

THE ALPHABET AND TEXAS

SIR: I have just received my copy of the March *MERCURY*, which contains an article on "The State of Texas," by Stanley Walker. The last paragraph of the article really gave me a huge laugh. It stated: "Texas a paradise? Well, yes. A grade B paradise, maybe, but a paradise nonetheless. Yippee!"

I know there are 26 letters in our alphabet, but not even Z could replace B in that statement. I and a good majority of the rest of the veterans who served in the Armed Forces will testify that Texas was no paradise. It was closer to being the residence of Satan.

The Texan is certainly the greatest "talker" in the country, but he is not the most hospitable person. I for one believe that Texas should be given back to Mexico. Mr. Walker can live in Texas by preference, but thank the heavens I don't.

I give credit to Mr. Walker for uncovering some of the most conspicuous fallacies about Texas. I wonder if they will read his article in Texas.

MALVIN ROBERT PECE

Long Beach, N. Y.

THE VANISHING LIFEGUARD

SIR: In the February AMERICAN MERCURY Bergen Evans, in "The Skeptics' Corner," mentions a lifeguard, Frank Crennen, and states that "he has dropped out of sight." [Mr. Crennen had been cited as an eyewitness to a case of a man's hair turning white overnight, a phenomenon that Mr. Evans says has never been proved.] I gave ex-lifeguard Frank Crennen a good cigar last summer and spoke to him dozens of times. He worked as a lifeguard for Manhattan and Brighton Beach Baths for many years, and is now a licensed masseur in Brooklyn.

I am reasonably certain that the Brighton Beach Athletic Club in Brooklyn has his present address.

I have known Frank Crennen for about 30 years and there is no doubt regarding his veracity. . . .

May I add that I know of a case of a man turning white overnight. The bedroom of his small children was struck by a bolt of lightning. It happened many years ago and I didn't investigate thoroughly. . . .

FRED G. HAAS

New York City

SIR: I am grateful for a lead that will permit me to check the story attributed to Frank Crennen. I have written to the Brighton Beach Athletic Club for Mr. Crennen's address. If it is forthcoming, I will write to Mr. Crennen. If he corroborates the story attributed to him by Mr. Thomas I will write to the principal involved and to such witnesses as Mr. Crennen can supply me with. If he can supply no witnesses or other supporting testimony, the case must be classified as "unproved."

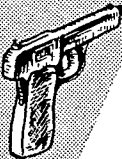

There is nothing at all personal in questioning Mr. Crennen's veracity. When one is questioning the veracity of a story one can only question its veracity.

If Mr. Crennen can make good on his story I'll send him a whole box of cigars, better ones than he got from Mr. Haas.

Mr. Haas' last paragraph is typical of these stories. His contribution amounts to this: I have now in my files one more allegation of hair turning white overnight, made by someone I do not know, concerning someone else whose name is not given, happening at some unspecified time and place and, therefore, impossible to examine. If Mr. Haas will give me the details I will start writing.

BERGEN EVANS

Evanston, Ill.

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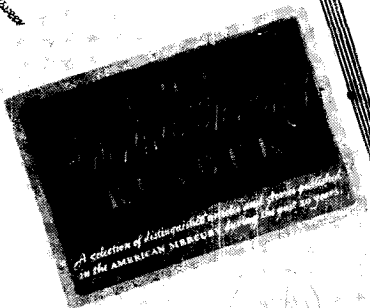
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