

FALANGE WORKS UNDER COVER

Spanish Fascist Movement a Valuable Aid to the Axis Forces in Latin American Countries

By ARNALDO CORTESI

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina, Jan. 3—It is remarkable how little attention has been paid to the Falange Española in all the inquiries that are made from time to time in South America to uncover activities of actual or potential enemies of the United States. The Falangistas, unlike Germans, Italians and Japanese, are not easily distinguishable from the citizens of the countries in which they live, and in this fact lies their ability to render useful services to their Axis friends.

The Japanese, Germans and Italians form separate and easily distinguishable groups in no matter what Latin-American country they live. Their activities can, therefore, be more easily discovered and combated. The Falangistas, instead, have woven themselves into the pattern of South American life to such an extent that defensive measures against them are difficult and perhaps even impossible.

Work of Agents

The function that is reserved to the Falangistas by whoever is responsible for planning the outlines of fifth column activities on this continent seems to be that of liaison between the Axis powers and directing circles in Spanish-speaking countries. Brazil, colonized by Portuguese, naturally is excepted.

The Falange, therefore, has nothing to do with the most widely advertised aspects of the fifth column peril, such as espionage, sabotage, fomenting unrest and discontent or working up popular sentiment against the Allies, and the like, but remains discreetly behind the scenes pulling secret wires that may influence the actions of upper circles.

How important is the role that the Falangistas play on the South American scene is, of course, a matter of sheer guesswork, but what is certain is that they possess very wide opportunities for rendering useful services to their

totalitarian patrons. They move in circles that are closed to most foreigners. They speak the same language, both literally and figuratively, as the directing classes in the majority of the South American countries.

The chief arguing point that the Falangistas have in their efforts to promote good-will for the Axis is that Germany is a great European barrier against the Soviets and that if Hitler were defeated communism would inevitably take

possession of all the countries of the world. An Axis victory is represented as a thing not desirable on its own merits but as a lesser evil as compared with a triumph of the Soviets. The Falangistas' arguments are perhaps seldom accepted at face value, but even when they are not they serve to spread doubt and uncertainty.

Effect on Catholics

The strongly Catholic character of the Falange Española enables it, moreover, to make its influence felt in at least some circles of staunch Catholics. Up to the moment when Hitler launched his mechanized might in the general direction of the Kremlin, the most devoted Catholics had no difficulty in deciding their attitude, since the two European countries at whose hands the church had suffered most were actually or implicitly at war with the democracies. Now, however, Catholic ranks may be considered split on the war issue.

It would be a mistake to suppose that all Spaniards on this continent are Falangists, since this is very far from being the case. Most Spanish immigrants are of the working class and, therefore, they are solidly republican and anti-Falangist. The greater part of Spanish immigrants that can be roughly described as intellectuals are also strongly anti-Franco. It is among the middle and upper classes that the Falange finds most of its recruits.

Action in Argentina

The greater part of the working-class immigrants settle in Argentina and Uruguay, and the strength of the Falange in these two countries, therefore, is relatively weaker than on the West Coast. In Argentina, by decree on May 15, 1939, the activities of all foreign organizations were restricted, and similar measures were taken in a few other South American countries. Apart from this, no effort was made to curb the Falange.

If General Francisco Franco, Spanish Premier, should decide to throw in his lot definitely and officially with Germany, most of South America would without doubt undergo a severe spiritual crisis. Many people, perhaps even some governments, would find themselves torn between their sentimental attachment to the old country and their loyalty to more recent gods, such as the United States.