

Assessment of the Position of the American Committee
for Liberation in Spain as of Mid-September 1962
by Howland H. Sargeant

35

A New Minister: New Policies

In June 1955, I came to Spain and negotiated the basic agreement with the then Foreign Minister, Martin Artajo which in principle permitted us to establish a radio relay installation on Spanish soil. From that time on most of our contacts have been with the Ministry of Information and Tourism. As a result of the recent changes in Government which took place in early July, a new and young and vigorous Minister of Information and Tourism, Mr. Manuel Fraga Iribarne, has taken office and has made a clean sweep of almost all of the previous officials of the Ministry. The previous Minister, Arias Salgado, had in effect retained his control over information in this country over a span of some eighteen years. He believed firmly in censorship, in strong control over all of the media of information within Spain, in jamming of foreign radio broadcasts directed towards Spain which he found offensive and was a man who had seldom if ever travelled beyond the borders of his own country. The new Minister unlike his predecessor has travelled a fair amount, speaks English well, has a background as a university professor and writer, and is clearly one of the young intellectuals of his generation. He may in fact be part of the "take-over generation" which is now rising to power in this country. He is a man of energy and a man of action and I suspect a man who does not yet listen as carefully and attentively as he ought to and will occasionally take an impulsive action rather than weighing all the arguments in the balance and making a judicious decision. He is obviously a man who is in a hurry. I think he feels that he is in a most sensitive position and that the only way he can carry out what he considers to be the new policies will be to consider himself expendable and not to count on remaining too long in the job. For reasons then both of temperament and of his own realistic assessment of his position he is inclined to be much more in a hurry than his predecessor was.

Spain's Situation Today

The situation in Spain, itself, seems to me to be a little like that of an airplane heavily loaded which is lumbering down the runway trying to get up enough speed for the take-off. You can feel the vibration in the wings and the straining of the airplane to become airborne. Whether this is going to happen now is a matter of some debate in Spain among experienced observers. I will note that German capital is flowing in unprecedented quantity into some areas of this country such as Catalonia which would seem to indicate a judgment on the part of some German investors that Spain is in fact on the point of making a substantial economic leap forward and is ready for the industrialization which has been coming slowly but inevitably. This means that the next eight or nine months may be very decisive in this country. A number of people I have talked to have said that if the new team and new outlook can get through the months of October and November the most sensitive part of the current situation will be behind them. The experienced man who is the head of the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group here, an old friend of mine named General Caldara, is a close personal friend of the Vice President, Muños Grandes. In some ways General Caldara's

Assessment of the Position of the American Committee--cont'd

contacts are unparalleled among officials in this Government that are the most influential. His own personal assessment to me was that if the new outlook and the new appointees can survive successfully and get their program under way, by next June they will be so far out in front and have gotten so much popular support that neither the communists nor the "liberals" will be able to make much headway against them.

What does this mean for ACL?

It is against this kind of situation that I think we must assess the position of the American Committee and the probable future for our radio installation here. My own belief is that the forces that are in motion in this country are in fact irreversible. If what now is at hand does not actually occur for any number of reasons that may happen under the present system and under the controlled economy which this one still is, it is only a matter of delay and postponement of something that will happen. When this occurs many of the things that have been known in Spain of the past will rapidly become outmoded. Instead of a large quantity of labor, largely unskilled and rendering all kinds of personal services at very low cost, there will become a scarcity of unskilled labor, a shortage of cooks and maids and gardeners and people of this kind, and it will probably happen before the Government and the economy have been able to develop the labor-saving devices and appliances that make this kind of transition possible and easy in other countries such as our own. Further, this is going to mean that wages will rise and very probably prices will rise although I am struck by the fact that the Minister of Commerce has said publicly that he thought over the next few months the prices of automobiles would go down but prices of food would rise. It was something that he felt was proper and he meant by this that he felt that the purchasing power of the people should be raised sufficiently so that they would be able to afford the higher prices that need to be paid for food in order to obtain a more balanced and more nutritious diet for the vast majority of Spain's population. My assumption therefore is that the American Committee will be working in a country where over the next few months and years the situation will be in its own way a little comparable to that of West Germany of some seven or eight years ago. We can expect to meet sharply competitive conditions for the Spanish labor that we recruit; it is probable that the costs of doing business will rise each year and that there will be increasing pressures which will result in the more effective organization and therefore the more effective collective bargaining power of the workers we employ.

ACL and the Political Realities in Spain

Now where does the American Committee stand from a political standpoint in Spain today? In the short run a great deal depends on the accuracy of my assessment of the character and the kinds of likely actions to be taken by the new Minister of Information. He is a young man in a hurry. He is trying to reverse policies that his predecessor had stood for during nearly two decades and had deeply embedded in the bureaucracy of the large and sprawling organization that he heads. He will be engaged in various vendettas and guerrilla warfare actions with older surviving elements influential around General Franco and with young and vigorous elements in other ministries who disagree fundamentally with

Assessment of the Position of the American Committee--cont'd

the new outlook and the new policies. He will, I am sure, regard himself as expendable with his main purpose being to accomplish what he can at whatever risk to himself. He said to me personally in our conversation: "Two years is a long time and especially long for a Minister of Information in this country and I don't know that I'll be around that long." However, he has gathered around him a group of people that seem to me to be far more open minded, to be on a higher level of intelligence, and to act much more like a team rather than an assorted group of individuals each jockeying for position and being played off one against the other -- which was very much the case under the preceding Minister.

On balance, I believe that the new Minister of Information believes that the American Committee is in a position to be helpful to him. I would count on a much greater measure of the Minister's own personal interest in and knowledge of our activities and a considerably larger measure of impatience for us to perform on those things where we have reached an agreement. One of the most important factors so far as our position with the new Minister and the Ministry itself is concerned is that the two Spanish people who have been closest from the beginning to our operations, Manuel Garcia-Duran and Ernesto Marrero, are obviously in strong positions in this new setup. In fact, Manuel Garcia-Duran, who for the last five or six years has been out of sympathy with the policies being pursued by the Ministry and was more and more stripped of his functions and perquisites and more and more shut out from the higher councils, now appears to me to be the only top surviving member of the Ministry concerned with radio and television who is being made a part of the new team and who is likely to have a strong and important voice in whatever reorganization is undertaken for radio and television by the new Director General, Senor Roque Pro Alonso and in the selection of key people. He may very well himself end up in a highly important job. He is a good and loyal and honest friend of ours and I believe represents an extremely important link to this new Ministry. In a somewhat similar position, we find Ernesto Marrero, a former field artillery officer and for this reason perhaps seeming close to the new Director General of Radio and Television who is himself a former field artillery officer. There is a good deal of speculation that Ernesto Marrero will in fact end up in an even higher position perhaps as the Chief Engineer for all of radio in Spain. The American Committee's relations with Garcia-Duran and Marrero are of the very best. We have gone to great pains to maintain them in this way and I believe that they feel a genuine friendship, respect and sense of identification with and participation in Radio Liberty's mission.

ACL Representation in Madrid

Now I will turn to the assessment of our position here so far as our representation in Madrid is concerned. We have been exceedingly fortunate in my opinion in having as our first representative in Madrid George Train, who was at one time the head of the Economic Section of the U.S. Embassy, and subsequently in retaining our present representative, George Dennis, who has an almost unparalleled experience in continuity of his life in Spain from the days before the Civil War, during the Civil War and afterwards with the IT&T offices here. George Dennis has access to almost every important member of the Government, is respected within the business community, both Spanish and foreign. He is aided by his remarkable wife, Amarie, who came here from Smith College as a student to the University of Madrid and is a specialist in 16th Century Spanish history.

Assessment of the Position of the American Committee--cont'd

She has written widely about this period and has received at least one decoration at the hands of the Government. George Dennis has also had in the past and continues to have the very best relations with the U.S. Embassy from the Ambassador down through all the principal officers. It is clear to me from my talks with Ambassador Woodward that this is a relationship that will continue. We are aided further by the fact that our first legal counsel in Madrid was Antonio Garrigues, now the Ambassador of Spain in the United States. This is well known to many of the people with whom we deal and in fact it is speculated that Antonio Garrigues may have been influential in suggesting the appointment of Señor Fraga as the new Minister of Information. In any event, they are good friends with mutual respect and admiration evident.

Summing up our relations and status within Madrid itself, I would say that at the end of seven years we find ourselves in a position to be envied. We have many assets and most of the changes that have occurred are in my opinion favorable to us rather than unfavorable. There are certain risks that accompany this strong position which I will come to a little later in this memorandum, but in my opinion the favorable side of the balance sheet is the one that deserves our attention at the moment.

ACL Representation in Catalonia

When we turn to our situation in Catalonia I find that here it also seems to be good. We picked an excellent representative to establish our operations and to maintain our presence and image in a way that is satisfactory to us in Barcelona in Jack Newman. He and his wife are well established within the American community there and have created good relations with the several key Spanish officials where this has been necessary. There will be some change in the role that Jack Newman plays because it is clear that the new Minister will no longer look to the man in charge of radio and television in Barcelona to act as a Subsecretary of the Ministry which was the case under the preceding regime. Luis Escurra was related to the former Under Secretary of the Ministry of Information, Villar Palasi (who, by the way, has just become the Under Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce -- an even more important position than the one he held before) but Escurra will no longer serve as a link between Barcelona and Madrid. The communications will be direct from Newman through Dennis to the Ministry or direct from Bertrandias in Munich to the Ministry depending on what the particular matter is. I see no particular difficulties arising in Barcelona because of this adjustment of the channels of communication. Escurra will stay on as the Director of Radio and TV in Barcelona and is regarded as a competent professional man in the field. In the area of Pals and the surrounding communities of the Costa Brava, our community relations seem to be extremely good, as a result in large part of sound policies that Jack Newman and early station managers wisely initiated and supported. With the granting of the 15% cost-of-living allowance increase to those on the local salary scale, I think we will have successfully allayed a spirit of restlessness and rising discontent and I see no immediate clouds on the horizon.

Assessment of the Position of the American Committee--Cont'dSome Risks and Problems for the Future

I have described what in many ways seems to me to be a far better situation than any of us could have envisioned even as recently as a couple of years ago for the position of the American Committee and its Radio Liberty relay transmitter station in Spain. Now I want to call attention to a few of the things that seem to me to be important and which offer both some problems and possibly some opportunities:

1. The pressure of the New Minister to share in some way in the facilities at Pals. I think this is something that we will no longer be able to put off. This is a man who is intelligent, who will follow up on any memorandum we prepare (as we have promised to do) describing the facilities and indicating what free time there now is and what targets could be reached during this free time. It may be that some token gesture such as permitting not regularly scheduled broadcasts but a Sunday program to Poland once a month or something similar to this will enable us to give him the token gesture that he obviously feels that he needs and needs promptly. We cannot be sure however that such a token gesture will be anything more than a short-time holding operation and in my judgment even though I think there are now potentially much greater opportunities than ever before to influence the content of the Spanish programs directed either towards Eastern Europe or towards the Soviet Union itself, I think that there are so many people entrenched in the bureaucracy that it is far too much to expect that within any short period of time the new Minister and the new Director General can clean out the incompetents and replace them with people who will be responsive to a more productive policy for broadcasting to those areas. Therefore, I am suggesting that we must face now the very likely prospect of permitting some type of regularly-scheduled broadcasts over the Pals facilities probably directed to one or more Eastern European countries in the languages of those countries; and probably broadcasts that will not always seem to serve U.S. national interests and reinforce U.S. objectives and policies in these areas.

2. These new people of the Ministry of Information had examined the contract and the amendments that we made with the preceding Minister. I think they are quite unhappy that under the amendments to the contract the old Minister got a little committee with some minor payments to the members of the committee but traded away the right of the Spanish to have a man with the title of Director of the radio station and a man with the title of Chief Engineer. They may wish to reopen this matter and try to amend the contract to put it back in its original status. They may offer to abolish the existing Commission on Relations with Amcomlib in order to effect this.

3. Although we have some informal assurance from the new Director General that Garcia-Duran and Ernesto Marrero will remain in their positions as the chief delegates from the Ministry to our Amcomlib operations, this is not a certainty but I'm inclined to believe that Garcia-Duran's influence will be strong enough so that if he is replaced it will be by a person who is satisfactory to us. Therefore, I do not see any real difficulty here even if changes are made in the persons of the delegates to Amcomlib.

Assessment of the Position of the American Committee--cont'd

4. There is some slight prospect of giving the Soviet regime another handle to their campaign about Radio Liberty and its alliances with nazis and fascists in the event that the Minister of Information decides that it is to his advantage or to the advantage of showing Spain's participation in the common cause in cooperation with Western European or North American nations to give more publicity to the fact of the existence of our relay installations in Spain. However, I don't regard this as a very serious problem at all. I continue to feel that Radio Liberty is judged more by its content by the Soviet listener than by what the regime may say about it.
5. There is some possibility that if the Minister of Information in fact requests us to make some kind of technical specialist available to review the technical facilities of Radio Nacional at Arganda, this might be a step preliminary to asking us for technical equipment but there is no indication as yet that this would be so and if we handle ourselves properly I do not think that this ought to constitute any major risks. We should provide the technical review if it is requested.
6. The desire by the Ministry to evaluate Radio Liberty output on the basis of complete texts of Russian scripts conceivably represents another risk to us but it is very likely that Mr. Trujeda who has been doing this for some time on a more limited basis and usually operating from the summaries that we have made available will probably be the man who will continue to handle this and he has assured us on several occasions that if this were the case Radio Liberty need have no particular concern. Nevertheless, there is always the danger that this new group of people may expect Radio Liberty to become more of a protagonist for the Spanish case as they see it than the Radio should become, and Mr. Bertrandias and I are agreed that it is in this area we must be polite but firm, and we will hope to educate such new people as the young and lively Mr. Santiago de Pablos when he and Garcia-Duran come to Munich probably around October 24th after Mr. Bertrandias has returned so that these possibilities are kept to a minimum.
7. There is potentially an opportunity here but I cannot yet make a very accurate assessment of how good it is to obtain the kind of influence in making the content of Radio Nacional's broadcasts behind the Iron Curtain less counter-productive and potentially more effective. I'm inclined to feel that this is not a short-term possibility but I believe it is one worth considering seriously and it is important to obtain the assessment of independent experts who are on the scene here and I would strongly suggest that this be taken up directly with them at an early opportunity.
8. A different kind of risk arises from the slow performance by the fabricators of the steel we need for our remaining antenna towers at Pals. I was disappointed to find that Don Miguel Mateu was taken ill with another of a series of kidney stone attacks and I was unable to see him personally although I did talk with his son-in-law, with his chief engineering adviser and with the rather unreliable head of the production sections of his steel fabricating plant. They appear not to be making the kind of progress with the new contract that we have every right

Assessment of the Position of the American Committee--cont'd

to expect and I can only hope that the incentives we have provided in that contract will in fact make them produce the fabricated steel sections and get the towers erected within the time schedules that we have laid down. There is no guarantee of this at the moment and it remains a major source of anxiety to me.

9. Treatment of Spanish strikes that caused the recent flap I think has now receded into the background and I doubt we will hear any more about this. There is some risk as I have already pointed out that the new team will expect Radio Liberty to be more of an apologist for Spain than we believe is warranted in presentation of a balanced news coverage of genuine interest to the Soviet listener. I'm inclined to think however that any major difficulty will be avoided by the opportunity of occasionally reporting in context a favorable development.