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NAVY DEPARTMENT  
Office of Naval Intelligence  
Washington, D. C.

December 19, 1941

SUBJECT: SPANISH REFUGEES IN MEXICO

NOTE: Prepared by the Counter Subversion Section, Office of Naval Intelligence, from reliable and authoritative information.

Spanish refugees began arriving in Mexico shortly after the fall of the Republic of Spain. At the present time it is believed that there are between 10,000 and 12,000 in this country, including persons of all sorts of political faiths. Mexican Government figures on the number now here are not considered reliable, and independent estimates were made on the basis of material obtained from various sources available to this office and the Embassy.

Most of the refugees are known Communists or leftists of strong radical leanings. There are quite a number of very prominent persons connected with the former Republican regime, both radical and moderate. A number are Catholic leaders, despite their Republican beliefs, and they are known to be associating here with the Spanish Monarchist Committee, for political reasons.

The refugee colony is filled with bitter hatreds. There is such continuous strife among the various shades of political opinion that Niceto Alcalá Zamora, ex-President of Spain, who came in on a recent refugee ship declined to remain there, and continued on to Cuba enroute to Argentina. He has told friends in the colony there that he wants to come to Mexico later if these quarrels are halted, but he terms the present situation an impossible one from the standpoint of Republican plans for the future of Spain.

The JUNTA de AUXILIOS a LOS REFUGIADOS ESPAÑOLES or J.A.R.E. is the group through which the Mexican Government handles the large incoming groups of refugees. It is legally constituted here to carry out what its title implies: aid to Spanish refugees. It is headed by Dr. Indalecio PRIETO, former Spanish Premier, who is always engaged in an argument with various Spaniards in the colony.

It is PRIETO's personal claim that his committee does not help known Communists, but confines its work to the "Left Republican Party, Socialist Workers Party, Left Republican Party of Catalonia, Basque Nationalist Party, General Workers Union, and National Conference of Workers", but these statements are regarded as propaganda aimed at obtaining more support from the United States.

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There are several rival groups, the largest of which is the Spanish Technical Aid Committee whose President is Dr. Jose Puche. Then there are Dr. Eugenio Serrano Pareja and Modesto Mayron Arias, who are the pro-democratic leaders and who claim to have thousands of the refugees as their followers. Since PRIETO has made some anti-democratic statements and has warned the refugees here and elsewhere to keep out of the Axis-Allies conflict, the pro-democracy group has been slowly growing in strength.

However, the two principal groups mentioned have most of the money and that makes the refugees dependent on them. The J.A.R.E. got most of its money from the sale of jewels taken out of the national pawnshops before the fall of the Republic, plus what money PRIETO could get his hands on. The Spanish Technical Aid Committee, known locally as Socorro Especial Republicana Espanol or S.E.R.E. obtained most of its money from the vaults of the Bank of Spain before Franco got into Madrid.

The J.A.R.E. is in the most powerful position because the Mexican Government obtains from it all the names of available refugees waiting to come here. The Mexican Government looks to it for all financing of the refugees, including transportation to Mexico and the clothing and feeding of them here until they obtain work. Thus, PRIETO and his co-workers are in command of the refugee colony, generally speaking. Associated with PRIETO in running the affairs of the J.A.R.E. are Jose GIRAL, former Prime Minister and former Minister of State; Jose ANDREU, Ex-President of the High Court of Justice of Barcelona; and Carlos ESPLA, Ex-Minister of Propaganda and former Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

It is the stated policy of the Mexican Government to admit Spaniards in numbers unlimited by quota. For that reason they have been filtering into the country a few at a time, as well as in large groups. For example, the American Consul at Veracruz reports the following Spanish refugee arrivals by months in 1941; January, 38; February, 45; March, 79; April, 34; May, 23; June-July, 58; August-September, 67; October, 74.

The Government wants farmers principally, and single men in particular. Despite this policy, the refugees represent all sorts of vocations and professions. In order to encourage farmers, the Government here set up a colonization project in the State of Chihuahua, but it has not been an outstanding success. There have been successes, however, in projects established by the J.A.R.E. or S.E.R.E. for their own benefit or the benefit of groups of refugees, including a furniture factory, steel foundry and countless commercial establishments, among which are innumerable cafes and shops.

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Most of the refugees are untrustworthy and certainly neither the J.A.R.E. nor the S.E.R.E. could be depended upon. PRIETO of the J.A.R.E. is known to be in contact with the Franco-Falange organization here, and through it with known Nazi agents. He also is involved with the Spanish Monarchist Committee, by admission of the latter. Russian agents have long kept contact with him.

He has a far wider list of contacts than the S.E.R.E. because this organization is run by pure Communists. The S.E.R.E. has a bank here called the FIASA and seems definitely interested in Communist aims to the exclusion of most everything else.

The coming of these thousands of refugees to Mexico has created many economic and social problems for this nation, and by infiltrating into Mexican politics, they are trying to get into position to take important roles in governmental direction. Many Mexicans of prominence have expressed apprehension over the influx of these people and have warned that they are interfering with Mexican control of trade unionism and commerce.

The Spaniards in many cases are more adept at business and politics than Mexicans. Those getting into business have picked out good locations for saloons, cheap dine and dance places and shops of various kinds. The teachers have succeeded in getting many good jobs and often better paying ones than Mexicans could obtain. In this regard, the largest Mexican newspaper UNIVERSAL, published an article November 13, 1941, complaining about this. It said that there is a tendency to do more for the refugees in many ways than for native-born persons, and it further intimated disapproval of the entrance of additional large groups into the country.

The 470 refugees who came in on the QUANZA on November 18, included diplomats, writers, magistrates, ex-government officials, lawyers, doctors, sailors, soldiers, fliers, teachers, mechanics, railroad workers, industrial employers and employees, and labor leaders. Each of these is attempting to set himself up in his own profession or vocation. The outcry in the profession is intense; also the labor unions have begun to feel the impact and complaints have been made. There are many restrictive laws designed to handle foreigners trying to get into professions and vocations, but so powerful is the J.A.R.E. that often the requirements are overlooked.

Also, Mexican officials in many instances are pro-Loyalist and try to help these refugees. For instance, General Roberto Fierro, Chief of the Mexican Air Corps, and an important figure in the Loyalist cause in Mexico during the Spanish Civil War, told the Assistant Attache that he wanted very much to utilize the services of a number of Spanish aviators, some of whom, he said, had as much as 14,000 hours because of their services on Spanish and French airlines. He would put these men on immediately but for their age, some of them being over 35.

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These refugees of all classes are causing plenty of difficulties for Mexico in economic and social ways but the potential dangers of political trouble in the Americas which might be caused by these people are far greater. On this matter, all of the Mexican and Spanish sources used for this report thoroughly agree, regardless of their political views.

PRIETO, by maintaining contact with groups which are classified as deadly enemies of Republicanism, plainly shows his great disregard for the democracies and his liking for intrigue with trouble-makers. It has been reliably reported that PRIETO has urged his group to aim for revolt in Latin America. The S.E.R.E. or rival group, agrees with this point and, in addition, wants to use Latin America as a basis for world revolution.

Although Russia is fighting Germany, PRIETO keeps in touch with Nazi agents. He seems to want to keep in their good graces, and either is doing work for them now in Mexico and elsewhere, or he must expect to cooperate in the future in the event Russia is defeated. Many of these refugees of both J.A.R.E. and S.E.R.E. consider the democracies as the principal enemies of radicalism, whether of the Left or Right, and they are willing to help Franco or Germany in a secret way in the hope of bringing about the downfall of democracy in this hemisphere.

They thus constitute a very important potential source of trouble for inter-American relations and for the stability of the individual American nations. Because the Spanish refugee machines seem to be centered in Mexico and work all over the hemisphere, they can work through all sorts of local contacts, including local government officials, leftists, Nazis, Italians, Falangists and Vichy-French.

PRIETO is believed to have allowed, for a price, the placing of spies for Germany and Franco among each group of refugees coming here. Certainly the Spanish colony has many questionable people posing as republican refugees. A number of such spies are reported by one reliable Mexican source to have been sent into every Latin American country posing as refugees. They keep in touch with Axis agents through front groups.

Alcala Zamora made the statement that the Spanish Civil War is still being fought in Mexico. He referred to the large numbers of Falangists and Monarchists there who are causing as much trouble for Mexico as the Republican refugees, and he emphasized the intense hatreds of one Spanish group for another.

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He is regarded as a sincere Republican hoping for reestablishment of the Republic in Spain, but many sources feel that he is deluded about alleged strife between the various Left and Right groups. The squabbling among the Republican refugees themselves, to which he also referred, is regarded as the noisiest and most discouraging. The various groups of the Left and Right, while battling on the surface, have too much contact with one another and thus disprove their own protestations of hatred for one another. They are all providing some measure of help and comfort to the Axis, and in so doing, they are working against the democracies.

FBI, MID, State Dept. and C.O.I. cognizant.

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