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THREE WHO ESCAPED

*We Talk Politics With A Spanish Girl
and Two Dutchmen*

"**L**A sangre no llega al río," said Carmen, the Spanish member of the Dutch Women's Auxiliary Corps, who was in Wellington with two companions, Hans and Pieter, members of the Dutch volunteer force. "That is a saying we have in Spain to mean that the blood never reaches the river," she explained. "Although we are always fighting among ourselves, we are friends the next day, because the Spanish are a temperamental, fiery people. That is why no one who has not lived in Spain can understand our politics."

All three spoke what most people would call good idiomatic English—it was a change to hear "You're telling me" spoken with a Spanish accent—and showed no obvious signs of the suffering they had all endured under the Nazi regime, which had disrupted their individual lives to an extent which is almost incomprehensible to the sheltered New Zealander. They were dressed in khaki. Hans and Pieter in the familiar battledress with khaki berets, and Carmen in a uniform similar to that of our Waacs, but with a black beret.

After the outbreak of the Spanish war, Carmen's family left Spain to live in Switzerland, where she was subsequently married. Her husband, a Dutchman, escaped the Germans by walking over the Alps to Switzerland with two companions, one of whom had to be dragged the last part of the way because he was unable to walk any further. She and her husband eventually found safety in England, after they had been through Spain and Portugal. Carmen spoke wistfully of the two-year-old daughter she had had to leave behind, who was born in Madrid and is now in England. Because of her Dutch husband, who is now serving with the Dutch army in New Guinea, Carmen belongs to the Dutch Women's Auxiliary Corps as a nurse, although she is Spanish. This auxiliary corps was formed and trained in England, and includes clerical workers, doctors and chemists as well as nurses.

Too Fond of Fun to be Fascists

Carmen tried to explain the Spanish political situation. The Spanish people, she emphasised, were not Fascists. "They are too fun-loving," she said. "A Fascist government would never hold the Spaniards long, never."

She said that the Spanish civil war was bad enough in itself, but was inflamed by the representatives of other nations, who entered Spain to throw in their lot either with Franco's Loyalists or the Republicans. What was, in effect, a family squabble, developed disconcertingly beyond family bounds and became uncontrollable. One of the troubles was the widespread poverty and illiteracy among the majority of the Spanish working class, particularly in the south of Spain, and many of the workers hoped that the Communist faction in the country would provide them with a better standard of living.

Herself, Carmen is opposed to the Republicans, whom she calls the "Reds" because, she told us, eleven of her family had been killed by them. She said it was typical of her country's political situation that although her family were forced to live in Switzerland because the "Reds" walked into their home and took complete charge, they could not return because the Fascists were now in power. The Spanish people's political outlook was dictated largely by expediency, she admitted. A police agent might approach a peace-loving citizen and enquire his political views. If the citizen gave the wrong answer he was killed. Hence it was wise to have the right answer, whatever one's fundamental beliefs.

German Aid to Franco

The Germans gained a hold in Spain, said Carmen, because they provided munitions for Franco during the civil war. Thus, Spain had incurred an enormous war debt and was forced to send money and food to Germany which should have gone to the civil population. Poor people were dying in the streets because the rations they were told they would receive were non-existent. Without money to buy from the black market, a flourishing concern in Spain, as in all European countries, they starved. Now the situation is that unless young people are members of the Fascist youth organisations they find it difficult to obtain work. Spanish citizens must give the Fascist salute, but most of them do so with the left hand, which is very far from indicating respect for Nazism. People are afraid to express their views because they have no knowledge of who will betray them. Yet in spite of all this, Carmen maintained that Franco had done good work in keeping Spain neutral under difficult conditions.

From a Spanish Prison

Her views on conditions in her country were supported by Hans, who had spent some time in a Spanish prison, after managing to cross the Spanish frontier in an attempt to escape from occupied Holland to England. He had been captured because he had no authorisation papers. The conditions in the Spanish prisons were terrible, he said. Men were cruelly put to death under the slightest pretext.

This was the second occasion on which Hans had entered Spain. The first time he had gone through Free France, which, he said, was more dangerous territory than occupied France because at every railway station there were German guards who demanded to see authorisation papers. The food was so poor in Spain, and he became so weak, that he went back to Switzerland to recuperate before returning to Spain and being thrown into prison.

After five months in prison, he was released through the help of the Dutch Consul, and then for the following eight months he waited in Madrid for his papers to come through to allow him entry into England. When he arrived

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