

Summer Welles Papers
Box 151 Folder 10
Major Correspondents
Roosevelt, Frankl. J. Nov-Dec, 1941

No. 27

November 19, 1941.

My dear Mr. President:

Thank you for letting me see the attached letter to you from Ambassador Bowers. I have read it with particular interest. In accordance with your request I am returning it to you for your files.

Believe me

Faithfully yours,

Sumner Welles

A true copy of
the signal origi-
nal.

Enclosures

The President,
The White House.

U:SW:PRH

L to Pres 11-19-41 re letters from Ambassador Bowers to the Pres.
11-9-41

C O P Y

Embassy of the United States
of America, Santiago,
November 9, 1941.

VERY CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Mr. President:-

I inclose herewith a translation of the rather remarkable letter I have received from Rivas Cherif, the brother-in-law of Azana, written from the Central Prison in Madrid, slipped out I have no doubt by one of the prison nuns or priests to our Embassy, and thence sent to me by pouch. I am sure you will find it of great interest and possibly not without some value to reflecting the life in Spain, now that the "army of liberation" is in control, and the people generally are starving. This man whom I knew well, one of the great creative artists in the dramatic field, was condemned to death as you know on the sole ground of his republicanism and his intimate friendship with Azana. I do not know that we intervened to save him, since Weddell in sending me the letter apparently had not the most remote notion of his identity. I know that some South American Republics who knew him through his artistic achievements did intervene vigorously and I have no doubt that is what saved his life. You may be interested in the conditions as he depicts them. Also in his reference to Portugal. Also in his reference to you. I wish there were some way to let him know I have received the letter but I cannot endanger his life. I have written Weddell that should he or any of his staff, who are absolutely discreet, ever visit the prison he might orally inform him.

The cold blooded tyranny and bloodthirsty cruelty of Franco, almost three years after the end of the Spanish struggle has no equal in the records of either Hitler or Mussolini. His present attempt to bully France into sending him the venerable Largo Cabellero, for the firing squad, is but additional proof that the gangsters in control in Spain have the instincts of the ordinary, or rather the extraordinary assassin.

You will be interested in the outcome of the Eucharistic Congress here and in the success or failure of the totalitarians under the agency of the Spanish Embassy in the attempt to use Russia to bind the Church here to the chariot wheels of the dictators. The Spanish are said to have contributed 50,000 pesos toward the expenses. In addition they had posters struck reading, "Spain, Chile and Christ" which were pasted on the street cars.

They

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They also organized a small group which on every possible occasion gave vivas for Spain. But the demonstration was always confined, at least in my presence, to the little trained group of playful performers. More important, some laymen's organization of reactionaries here managed to have the Spanish Ambassador put on the program for a speech--the only diplomat. I have failed to find that he has spoken. Certainly the press has been silent about it if he did. I am going to inquire, since it seems possible that the Cardinal on his arrival may have vetoed that plan.

Father O'Hara was very popular. I noticed on formal function occasions that he attracted more attention than any one else except the Cardinal. I really think I put on the best, certainly the most noticed show, of any Embassy. I gave a dinner Friday night in O'Hara's honor. I had thirty-two men. And--please observe this-- I had all the heads of the Hierarchy of the Church in Chile, the Archbishop of Santiago, who is in line for a Cardinal's hat, his Chancellor, his Secretary, the priest of the Cathedral, the other Archbishop of Chile Subercassaux, The Nuncio, the Nuncio's Secretary, the head of the Seminary del Pontificio, the Rector of the Catholic University, the Sub-Rector of the Catholic University, the Chaplain of the Chilean Armed Forces. Archbishop Caro, very old, very liberal, looking and acting much like Gibbons, never goes out at night but he came to my dinner. Not one of the high ecclesiastics but accepted. And because O'Hara is Chaplain of the Army, Navy and Air force, I had General Escudero, Commander in Chief of the Army, General Castro, Commander in Chief of Air, and Admiral Allard, head of the Navy came up from Valparaiso for the dinner. Then I had Rossetti, the Foreign Minister whom I made co-host. Father Wiegel, American priest stationed here, of course was present.

The press report of the dinner attracted enormous attention and the Catholics are immensely pleased. Cruchaga was present, and he laughingly said that he did not see any communist--referring to the fact that you and I are communists in the Spanish propaganda. I warned him he had not looked behind the curtains and under the chairs.

So I think we came out better than any other Embassy as far as the Congress is concerned. One

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One fine thing happened which I believe strengthens the Government here, especially the President. The President is ill, in bed. The Cardinal called, of course, and was admitted to see him. He went thence directly to the chapel of the Moneda Palace and prayed for the President's speedy recovery. This, together with the magnificent manner in which the Government cooperated to make the Congress a triumph as probably had effect on Rightests... It ought to anyway.

With warmest regards,

Sincerely,

CLAUDE G. BOWERS

Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt,
The White House.

C O P Y

12-VIII-1941
Central Prison
Puerto de Santa Maria

To Mr. Bowers,
Ambassador of the U.S.,
Santiago, Chile.

Dear Mr. Bowers:

I have written to you twice with the promise on the part of those who took the letters to mail them in Buenos Aires. I deduce that they did not do so, as I have not had an answer. The amiability of your colleague in Madrid permits me to try for the third time with certainty.

I will tell you about my fate since the 10th of July of last year. You will not know that the Spanish Police arrested me with the help of the Germans without the slightest demand for extradition on the French Government in company with Don Carlos Montilla, ex-Chargé d'Affair in Belgrade and Havana, and with Don Miguel Salvador who had held the same post in Copenhagen. I was informed that Azana had applied to President Roosevelt that he should recommend to his Ambassador in Paris and he in his turn to Bordeaux our departure in an American ship. In effect I sent a telegram which undoubtedly never reached the President in view of the evasive attitude with which I was received by the American Consul in Bordeaux, and a few days afterward the Secretary of Mr. Biddle, functioning as Minister for the then unoccupied zone, denied me the possibility of talking with him, as well as being able to help the situation of President Azana and his family.

Taken to Madrid where we were incommunicado in a subterranean prison of the Puerto del Sol (the Old Ministry of the Interior) for 101 days. We were taken before a summary urgent court martial, the twenty-first of October, together with the ex-Minister, Zugazagoitia (who had been brought to the prison after us) and the newspaper man, Cruz Salido, and the Austrian deputy, Teo Domiro Menedez, who were arrested in Bordeaux, and by chance brought with us - the last two. Afterwards they also brought President Companys whom they took secretly to Barcelona, who was secretly executed in September, condemned to death for adhesion to the rebellion. My case being considered more serious in the prosecutor's charge for having suffered "the pernicious influence of the execrable Azana".

Serraño

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Serraño Suner arranged that Domiro Menendez should be condemned only to perpetual imprisonment. The lawyer and other family and friends succeeded in getting the execution for that night suspended on the grounds that the prosecutor had established a category of responsibilities in which my two diplomatic companions and I figured behind Dominro Menendez. The Minister of War, Varela took the case to Franco when he returned from his interview with Hitler. Franco asked why in any case they had not shot the first two, so Zugazagoitui and Cruz Salido were executed on the ninth of November. On the third Azana had died at Montauban in France.

Our lawyer told me that Franco adduced that death to save my life, as justification to those who asked my head of him at any cost. Nevertheless we were not notified of the commutation until the fifteenth of January. In the meantime in the prison of Porlenco in Madrid we saw go out in periodical groups of twelve or eighteen a week sixty some people. The Chaplain of the prison told me that in a year and a half in that prison alone he had assisted (in executions) more than two thousand. Some had been condemned for months. In January there were 14, 000 left waiting execution. At present it is calculated there are 750,000 or 800,000 prisoners. I do not know whether that includes those who are in concentration camps. There are a little over 5,000 of us in this prison. We have been more than 6,000. The prison had a normal capacity for 600. We political prisoners who are in the great majority are given the same treatment as the ordinary criminals.

During the winter months one or two people a day have died of hunger, with the diagnosis of heart failure. In the street the same thing happens, according to the nuns and monks who are in charge of the prison. Day before yesterday in Cadiz they shot a doctor, a communist deputy, Daniele Ortega who had been condemned in March, whose sentence I supposed had been commuted. With him twenty-five other people were shot.

In spite of the tremendous terror (there is a special tribunal against the Masons) the Captain General of Sevilla has had to dictate a special decree of repression against the armed parties which still remain in Sierra Morena and in the mountains of Asturias.

In

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In spite of the total political organization of the Liberal leftists, the Republican sentiment continues with the strength unsuspected by those who read only the newspapers, and have only official information. Keep in mind that only the families of the Republicans dead or prisoners represent in round numbers, and I am being conservative (counting ten persons for each individual directly injured) some 12,000,000. More than half of the total population of Spain. Everyone including themselves has the impression that the present rulers will last as long as the Germans are in the Pyrenees. I tell you this especially because I know to what a point you realize and informed President Roosevelt, what the ruin of the Spanish Republic signified for Europe and the world. If only the other Ambassadors, then, the English and the French especially, had seen as clearly as you! I understand that the present Ambassador of North America in Madrid is perfectly informed of the situation. Without any Gallup Poll at hand I can assure you that 75% at least of the Spanish, some through knowledge, and the majority through natural instinct, which as you know is very sharp among the Spanish popular classes, swears by Churchill and by Roosevelt, particularly Roosevelt because he has known how to define categorically the fundamental principles of this war for indivisible liberty. Spain is one of the neuralgic points and vital for America "and Africa".

I personally was much interested by the declaration made a few months ago by the American Minister in Tangiers, and the mere affirmation that America had never recognized de jure the Protectorate. Perhaps this interested me more because of my direct Cherrifian descent. I do not know if you know that my mother's great grandfather, son of the Sultan, renounced his rights to the throne to become a Catholic, and to marry in Spain in 1769. One of his sons commanded as a Colonel in the battle of Balien against Napoleon.

The police have returned to me alone of all my papers these family records.

I wish that you might say to your Colleague, the Ambassador in Madrid, to what a point it would be interesting for him to talk with me and my friends (although few of them remain and those in hiding in Madrid. Some contact must be organized with our immigrants in America.

I know

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I know that with all this I am risking my head a second time, if only it can be for something. Otherwise I know that thirty years of writing novels in a dirty prison await me. Mr. Hoares English are following the same prudent and short sighted policy. They do not finish informing themselves ever. They are sure but slow.

If you answer me through your colleague perhaps I can give you news of real interest with relation to Portugal in particular. I do not know if your colleague in Madrid knows the confidence which beyond our relationship united me with my brother-in-law. My wife and my sisters could not see the President on their way through America to Mexico, although they wanted to. They were very sorry.

Put me at the feet of your wife.

Your always affectionate

CIPRIANO DE RIVAS CHERIF