

## Red Scares and Blacklists

**O**n March 10, 1949, the anguished Milton Wolff paid a call on William C. Dunham, chief of the Spanish desk at the State Department in Washington, D.C. The Franco government had recently sentenced nine Spaniards to death for leading protests against the regime, and Wolff had come to plead for U.S. intervention to save their lives. A transcription of their conversation survives.

**DUNHAM:** "Of course, we do not make representations in the cases of avowed communists. You wouldn't expect us to, would you?"

**WOLFF:** "After all, we have a certain responsibility for the actions of these men. State Department releases . . . and the United States position at the United Nations, all call for a change in the Franco government. That is what these men are trying to bring about. We should support their efforts by more than just words."

**DUNHAM:** "All our statements specify 'by peaceful and orderly means.'"

**WOLFF:** "They cannot make a change without organizing and belonging to a trade union, a nationalist

group, or a banned political party, and belonging to such a group, or party, is considered an act of violence against the government by Franco.”

DUNHAM: “Nevertheless, we cannot and will not intervene except in rare cases.”

WOLFF: “Not even in the name of justice? Not even if the case is an obvious frame-up and the death sentence is handed down in a summary court martial?”

DUNHAM: “That is right. But come, they are not summary courts martial. They are military trials and they are not adequately defended, that is true, but they are permitted to make long harangues in their own behalf before being sentenced. Not half so many are being executed these last months as were executed before. [At this point Wolff apparently made an unrecorded comment.] Ha, ha, ha, yes. . . . Maybe there aren’t as many left to be shot . . . hah, hah, hah. Yes, I will send a wire to Culbertson in Madrid inquiring about these names. . . . If the men are not communists and haven’t blown a bridge or killed anyone, we might make representations in their behalf.”

Wolff then turned to the question of the Latin American countries reopening their embassies in Spain, with the approval and encouragement of the United States.

DUNHAM: “Of course! We were against withdrawing the ambassadors in the first place. . . . Never helped any, this withdrawal.” . . .

WOLFF: “The withdrawal of ambassadors was a weak move, but it was better than the nothing you all proposed. . . . The thing we want is not a retreat from this weak action, but more positive action—a break in relations.”

. . .

DUNHAM: “Positively not! We are not going to break relations with Spain. . . . There is no support for such action! . . . No, I don’t mean there isn’t any anti-Franco feeling . . . but no support for a break. No, I am not sure how much anti-Franco feeling there is in America. Sure I know about the protests . . . mere form letters and cards.”

WOLFF: “A signed postcard is a better gauge of public opinion than a Gallup poll. . . . After all, people don’t sit down and write letters. . . . They should be paid more attention to.”

DUNHAM: "That is interesting, the way you put it I mean. But . . ."

WOLFF: "You mean that is the way it is officially considered?"

No reply.

Dunham then expressed uncertainty about the U.S. position regarding the admission of Franco into the United Nations.

WOLFF: "Well, you are getting everything worked out the way you want it.

You blocked, parried and delayed all actions against Franco since 1945 when there was the best possibility to restore the Spanish republic . . . with just this idea in mind. To sweep another tinhorn dictator into the basement along with the other dictators, kings, etc., that you have already collected."

DUNHAM: "You credit us with too much foresight. I am sure that that was not the original plan."

WOLFF: "You couldn't have planned it better."