

The Deportation of Francisco Fernandez

By Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, April 1955, 3, 7

Summary: Describes the deportation to Spain of Francisco Fernandez from a Federal prison. Lauds his dedication to human freedom, protest against the state, and decries all totalitarian regimes. (DDLW #918).

This morning, April 6, on the eve of Holy Thursday, Francisco Fernandez was put on the Italian liner, Vulcania, which stops at Lisbon, Gibraltar and Barcelona before it gets to Italy, and held under guard in the tourist class smoking room until the ship sailed at noon. Tom, Roger and I saw him off. Charlie McCormack missed out because he was trying to park the car. Ammon was away on a trip to Maryfarm. There was no time to notify any of his anarchist friends, since the call had come in from Federal prison on West St. this morning that he was being deported this noon. The two agents of the Department of Justice kindly brought him down to the office of the Catholic Worker so that he could get some warm clothes for the boat. Dick Charpentier gave him his leather jacket, and Bob gave him several pairs of socks and Smoky Joe contributed his shoes. The men came from the kitchen to wish him farewell and the whole house was sad to see him go. We had grown to love him very much. He had worked with us, baking bread, 300 loaves a week, making sandals, taking the Puerto Rican children from next door down to the farm for a rest for their mother and fun for them, and bringing one of the Scupoli kids into the zoo last week.

He had spent the last few days in the Federal prison with two or three hundred other prisoners, detained for narcotic charges, counterfeiting, and other offenses against the Federal law. There were the Puerto Rican Nationalists waiting to be sent back to Puerto Rico to the inhuman prisons there. Political prisoners, criminals, all are treated alike, the non violent with the violent, but the place is clean, the food is good, the guards impersonal, not bullying. There were radio, television, movies. There were also bars at the windows and locks on the doors. When you visited, you sat behind glass partitions and spoke through a telephone. It is strange, sitting so close to anyone, looking them in the eyes, seeing their mouths move and hearing them only through the earphones.

Francisco is in prison, without freedom, because he believes in freedom. He is ready to lay down his life for an idea, to place such an emphasis on freedom that men will begin to realize what they have lost. (We would not talk so much about it if we had not lost it.) Before the first world war, there was no such thing as passports and visa's and all these barriers to immigration that the Pope has so spoken against when he cries out for a living space for the poor. Now we are ticketed, and docketed and numbered, and registered and secured, and it is a sad and pitiful thing to see a man fumbling for papers to prove his existence, his right to work, to eat.

Francisco's life is a protest against the State. Offered a parole, he refused to sign it. To him, that would be placing a pinch of incense on the altar of Caesar. The early Christians no doubt were just as hard to understand. But in these days of the totalitarian State, when we have lived through the regimes of a Hitler, a Mussolini, a Stalin and their equivalents, when we see whole countries becoming satellite countries, we realize that if there were more Francisco's, unafraid of jails and firing squads, half the world would not be enslaved today. Or how much more than half is it?

Francisco deserted from Franco's Navy nine years ago and jumping ship stayed here in America, aside from one year in Paris. We do not know what will happen to him in Spain. We beg your prayers.