Spain: Intellectually Passive

By CAROL STARR

The Spanish educational system is a direct reflection of the economic, social, and political structure of the "modern" paradox of Spain. Franco has succeeded exceedingly well in instilling a national attitude of complete passivity towards any kind of intellectual development.

At this point the Spaniard feels there is little place for intellectual enrichment in his society and because of his inability to obtain the maximum benefits from education, expects little from it.

This is not too amazing considering that the Spanish educational system has little to offer the average man. The secondary and higher institutions of learning are monopolized by the still small middle and upper classes and the limited influence of the industrial revolution now beginning in Spain encourages an even more restricted system of education.

Dimly Lit Room

The basic problems of the system as it now exists are the absence of a broadly based educational program and the lack of adequate institutions in which the people can fully participate.

A couple of week-ends ago when I was in Toledo, a group of friends and I passed by an open door which was labeled "escuela primaria." We walked into a dimly lit room containing 20 antique desks, two small blackboards, a picture of Franco, and a crucifix.

We were informed that this was the boys' public elementary school for the urban population of the town of 46,000. Next door was another room of the same structure which was the girls' half of the school.

Only One Teacher

About 40 students of all grades are taught by one teacher in each of these classrooms. There are 43,600 more of these one-teacher classrooms out of the 106,000 public elementary school classrooms in the country.

Government Controls

The Government's role in relation to education has been direct; perhaps directly passive but direct. The short-lived Republican concentrated much of its program in the educational field. One thousand new schools were built in 1938 alone in the midst of war, and in Republican Spain of 1937.

With the end of the Civil War the censor was installed and schools neglected. As little emphasis as possible was placed on education until the more recent "industrial revolution."

Labor Skills Short

Apparently the acute shortage of skilled labor was brought to the attention of the government. A new 5 year program was begun in 1967 to build 16,000 new classrooms by 1963; although the number was not reached, construction continues.

Elementary teachers' salaries were raised 100% (now they earn $1,000 a year; high school wages vary from $2000 to $3000 annually.) Many new labor technical high schools have been built to train skilled workers. Five labor universities, with attendance based on scholarship only, have been constructed to train factory managers and technicians.

Although the future holds promises of a more industrialized society, it holds little promise for improvement in the intellectual development of the people's minds. Antiquated teaching methods are used throughout all stages of the educational development.

Spanish Pride

Students receive little opportunity to think creatively; memorization is the key to the system. The tragedy of the situation is that Franco has played on the Spanish character in instilling this feeling of passivity towards education. Because of the lack of intellectual development, Spanish pride will not admit its importance.