PERSONAL AND
CONFIDENTIAL.

Mexico, October 7, 1942.

Dear Sumner:

I hesitate to add anything to your already too great burdens, but the picture which Dr. Saladinagas has given me of the situation in Cuba is so disturbing that I am sure you will wish to give it your personal attention. You will note from the copy of the despatch I am appending hereto that the Mexican Government is disposed to give petroleum products to Cuba if certain convoy arrangements can be made. The despatch explains how these conversations between the Mexicans and the Cubans started and the part which Dr. Saladinagas has played in them. In spite of its length I am sure you will wish to read this despatch, and in this letter I shall give you as briefly as I can some of the background which you would wish to have.

In the first place I should tell you that during my two year's stay in Cuba I found no one who is a firmer and more understanding friend of ours than Saladinagas who is any way active in the Cuban picture or who is in present prospect of being active therein. He is, I believe, the most powerful figure in Cuban politics aside from the President and has greater general respect and confidence than the President and than any other man in Cuban politics. He is young and I think desires to devote himself to the public service. I may be naive, but I think Saladinagas wishes to do this out of public spirited motives, and of course to satisfy a personal political ambition which is entirely legitimate, and it is in many ways fortunate that his leanings run this way. He is entirely honest, in my opinion, and I have not known him to benefit by any of his activities in the government and I believe he is generally considered in Cuba as an altogether honest man in politics. In the difficult

The Honorable
Sumner Welles,
Under Secretary of State,
Washington, D. C.
difficult problems which we had to handle in Cuba I never found a more understanding and helpful man than Saladrigas.

There is no doubt that Saladrigas wants to be President, to succeed Batista, that Batista has no desire to succeed himself and which he could not constitutionally do, and that Batista desires Saladrigas to follow him. That the personal relationship which existed between Saladrigas and Batista while I was in Cuba still persists is obvious by the fact that Saladrigas is in practically daily telephone conversation with Batista. Saladrigas stayed with me at the house during a week of the time that he has been herein Mexico City and I noted that during that week I believe not a day passed that Saladrigas did not call the President or that the President did not call him to consult with him about practically every move which he made. I have been away from Cuba for about seven months, but from what I gather from my Cuban friends, a good many of whom come here, there is no doubt that the responsible elements in Cuba are looking to Saladrigas as the next President of Cuba. That Saladrigas wishes to be President there is no doubt and he has frankly told me so.

Saladrigas came here at the head of this mission to attend the Mexican Independence Day celebrations and to sign an agreement with Mexico on mutual patrol measures. I think he undertook this mission largely for the purpose of getting a rest after the extremely strenuous period through which he had gone. I believe him when he says that he did not come here to discuss the question of oil or other matters. The Mexican Ambassador to Cuba, however, had been talking with him in Cuba, and being here at present, continued these talks with Saladrigas here on the possibility of Mexico supplying oil to Cuba, as well as certain iron and steel products and other goods. Saladrigas talked over these things with me in a purely personal and confidential way, and I told him that so far as Mexico supplying iron and steel and certain other products was concerned, I thought he was wasting his time, as Mexico was not in a position in the first place to supply them, and in the second place there was no way of transporting them. When it came to oil, I said that undoubtedly Mexico had some petroleum products which she could supply to Cuba, but a host of problems arose in this connection which, if they could be solved, there would still remain the question of transportation and convoys. I told Saladrigas frankly that I could not enter into these discussions except in this purely personal and confidential way, as so far as Cuba's needs were concerned they had to be discussed between Havana and Washington or, if he saw fit, by him in Washington. Saladrigas said he thoroughly understood
understood this but that he merely wished me to know what the situation in Cuba was and he wished me to know every­thing that he was doing here and he wished the Department to know everything that he was doing, as that was so definitely his policy and the policy of the Cuban Govern­ment. As a result of my conversations, Saladrigas had practically abandoned all thought of discussing any of these Cuban needs while he was here, and was planning to go to Miami to meet his wife and spend a few weeks at Daytona, and then perhaps a few days in Washington before returning to Cuba.

During his stay here, however, President Batista and others in the Cuban Government kept mentioning to him in the telephone conversations he had with them the increasing difficulty situation in Cuba, politically and economically, growing out of the lack of adequate supplies of oil, and for this reason he felt that he had to at least discuss, as he was authorized to by the President, the question of oil with the Mexicans, which they were prepared to discuss with him.

Saladrigas has given me a very disquieting picture of the Cuban internal political and economic situation. His story of the recent political developments in Cuba which finally led to the resignation of the Cabinet which he headed, is most disturbing. It does not appear that the situation has in any sense improved, and on the contrary, the political situation is deteriorating. Behind this there is undoubtedly an increasingly serious economic situation of which I am sure Braden is keeping the Depart­ment informed, and I think he is a man of such keen perception that nothing in this respect would escape him. Saladrigas dictated one day, here in the Embassy, at my request, a resume of some things he had told me which I am enclosing herewith and which you will wish to read. As Saladrigas himself said, I was to read this memorandum as though we were thinking out loud for himself. I think it is an honest statement of what Saladrigas really feels. He tells me that there is very real disillusion­ment in practically all circles from the top down in the country. The President, he says, is absolutely firm in his position as far as we are concerned and he says that the President is remarkably understanding of the real situation and of the need for sacrifices in Cuba, etc. He points out, however, that the $25,000,000 loan for roads, etc., has served no purpose whatever, as it has been impossible to do anything on any of the projects so important for the maintenance of Cuban economy, as we have not been able to supply any of the raw materials.
He points out that no definite arrangements have yet been made with respect to the next sugar crop. Above all, he points out that unemployment is increasing and that they have no means of putting these men into the Army, for they have no equipment to give these men. It is not a question of resources of the government as much as it is a question of materials of various kinds. The most serious situation, he points out, is that of oil.

Saladrigas has told me that he has the gravest fears with respect to political and economic developments in Cuba. He says that on the one hand things are getting tighter in every way with respect to materials and in the general economy and industry, and on the other hand the Cuban people feel that they have, as a people and government, cooperated with us in the most complete way. The people are beginning to feel a definite disillusionment with respect to us. They feel that we are doing more for other countries in the Americas than we are doing for Cuba. They hear about all sorts of things we are doing for others who have not been so close to us and who may not be so close to us now. They feel that we are neglecting the oldest and most steadfast friend in cultivating new friends. Saladrigas says that he and Batista have understanding of this situation, but that there is no use in trying to convince the people. Words will not convince them. He says there is a deterioration in the Cuban feeling with respect to us and with respect to the war. He feels that this has become accentuated and may even precipitate a crisis. With a man like Zaydin at the head of the Cabinet, who does not have either personal or political confidence of any considerable section of the people and who cannot make himself felt, the situation is in no way helped.

I somehow feel that Saladrigas should really tell you this story himself, because I am sure that it would be more helpful than any reading of this letter and of the appended documents. I can only say that what he has said to me has greatly concerned me and I think it must be a cause of very real concern to us, because it would be unhappy and disastrous if we should have any real crisis in Cuba. The work of many years, painstakingly done by us at home and by well-disposed people in Cuba, could rapidly be destroyed and the effect in the Americas would be most unhappy. There are few people in Cuba who, if they had painted the picture as Saladrigas has done to me, I could have believed and given credence to the way I believe we must give credence to Saladrigas. He is one of those Cubans who is so thoroughly convinced of the identity of Cuban interest with ourselves in every
every way and that Cuba can do nothing without being in full agreement with us, that I am sure he would not try to mislead us in any way and that his fears with respect to developments are honest fears. It is the position of men like him in the Cuban picture that we must conserve if we have regard to the future. I did not discern any bitterness in anything that Saladrigas said, and I know he tries to be completely understanding and is unusually understanding, but I can detect that he, too, feels that we are neglecting old friends in making new ones. There is nothing more dangerous than a friend scorned or neglected, and our best friend must be affected in a measure when he feels himself neglected or overlooked.

Specifically with respect to this question of petroleum products which has been raised by the Mexican Government with me through Dr. Padilla and as a result of conversations which have been going on between the Cubans and Mexicans, I may say that I think this is, in many respects, the major factor in the present problem. Cuba has no coal. Her whole industry and economy have been based on petroleum products for fuel. This applies in a large measure to her agriculture as well as to her industry, and to her transportation. We are now giving her 40% of her normal needs, exclusive of military needs and for the electric power company. Saladrigas says that this is utterly inadequate to maintain the economy. I understand that all gasoline for private cars was stopped last week, but that this will not help the situation much and of course aggravates public feeling still more. I gather from Saladrigas that this question of oil from Mexico for Cuba was explored by our Embassy with the Department and turned down by our Navy, as convoys from Mexico to Cuba would be too expensive and impracticable for lack of convoying vessels or planes. The plan proposed by the Mexican Government in the appended despatch is dependent on convoying these tankers from Tampico to a Cuban port. The convoying would have to be infrequent. Whether it would have to be done by our naval vessels or by planes or by both is a naval problem to which I do not know the answer. The Navy has already said that it is impracticable to provide protection for Mexican tankers from Tampico to Cuba. The probabilities are that they will say so again. The only observation I have to make in this connection is that if this is the Navy's answer it should be a carefully considered one, keeping in mind all the factors, and that the failure on our part to get adequate oil to Cuba may provoke, in the end, and even in the foreseeable future, and even more difficult naval problem with respect to Cuba for the Navy.

I do
I do not think that the Mexicans are in any way set on this idea of supplying oil to Cuba. To supply gasoline will, I believe, mean a certain sacrifice for Mexico. Heavy oil and Diesel oil Mexico can supply, and in a month or two from now she could supply the additional gasoline which Cuba needs above the quota we now are furnishing her. I gather, from what Dr. Padilla says, that the Mexican Government is taking this step only as a measure of collaboration with Cuba and with us. If Cuba gets the oil from some other source I think Mexico will be as satisfied as though she were sending the oil. Naturally it would give the Mexicans a certain satisfaction to supply oil to a needy ally, but I do not think this is the paramount question with the Mexicans.

The question is to get adequate oil to Cuba. As we are now sending periodic convoys to Cuba in which convoys are tankers carrying the allotted quota to Cuba, it seems to me that the problem is best met by putting a few more tankers into the convoys which are periodically dispatched to Cuba. I know this raises the question of additional tankers, but even with the scarcity of tankers the additional Cuban needs are so relatively small that it would probably involve only one or two tankers additional in these convoys. The question of the oil itself is certainly no problem, for our oil people tell me that we have plenty of that and to spare.

There is, of course, the problem, with which I am not familiar but which may to some of our people seem a serious one, and that is that I understand there is a sort of oil pool and that each American Republic which figures in it has a certain percentage allotted to it of its normal needs, and that this percentage for Cuba is 40 per cent. The question may be raised that this percentage for Cuba cannot be raised by us without bringing up similar questions with others of the American Republics. In view of the traditional relationship between Cuba and ourselves, in view of the present problem and in view of what we must look forward to in the future, in view of the importance of this close neighbor to us for strategic and economic reasons, and for any number of factors with which you are so familiar that I need not mention them here, I think there is ample reason for us to do whatever is necessary to supply the minimum quantity which Cuba needs in the way of petroleum products to keep her economy going.

I am sure this matter will be examined in the Department from the broad and most understanding point of view. I need not tell you that I would not have raised this question.
question with you were it not that the initiative of
the Mexican Government has made it necessary for me to
do so. I have plenty to do here, as you so well know,
without mixing in Cuban problems and I have no intention
to do so. I can only express the conviction that it is
a problem which cannot be set aside or lightly considered,
but that we must make every effort to find a solution,
either through this proposal which the Mexicans have
put forward, or through sending more oil to Cuba by the
periodic convoys now leaving our ports for Cuba.

I do not believe that Saladrigas is looking for poli­
tical capital out of this, but it is obvious, of course,
that if something results from this initiative to relieve
this deeply distressing situation in Cuba, it will add
to his stature and it will be helping the war effort for
the present and for the future. Saladrigas is here and
I understand that Mrs. Saladrigas is arriving today to
be with him during the remainder of his stay. He plans
to remain here until some satisfactory solution of the
oil matter can be worked out. I have in no way discussed
the possibility with him, but if you would wish him to
come to Washington I am sure he would be glad to do so.
It would, I believe, be very useful for you in many ways
to talk with him, although I have tried as briefly as
possible to give you the picture as he has given it to me.

With all good wishes,

Cordially and faithfully yours,

G. S. Messersmith.

Enclosures:
1.- Copy of despatch No. 4368 of October 7, 1942.
2.- Copy of strictly confidential memorandum
prepared by Dr. Saladrigas.