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Mexico, D.F., March 16, 1946.

Secret

Dear Spruille:

I had a long conversation with the President of Mexico at his home in Los Pinos yesterday afternoon (March 15). During the course of it, we discussed at some length the Argentine situation and I wish to report on that aspect of our conversation in this letter. In this connection I should refer to my secret and personal letter of February 28, in which I made some personal comment on the Argentine situation. I also wish to refer to my letter of March 2, in which I made reference to the speech of Secretary Byrnes, which indicated that we would take a stronger attitude with reference to Russia, Franco, and the Argentine. I also wish to refer to my letter of March 21, in which I reported on a conversation which I had with Castillo Nájera, as well as to my secret letter of March 14, in which I reported on a further conversation with Castillo Nájera.

My conversation with the President yesterday afternoon was for the purpose of discussing the matter of the Mexican workers so much needed in the United States, and to get him to remove the limitation which the Mexican Government had made with respect to eight States and which would have caused so much difficulty. I am covering in a despatch this part of the conversation on the workers, which was most successful, and the President of Mexico showed a statesmanlike and completely understanding attitude.

I had decided before I called on the President yesterday that it would be better for me not to discuss the Argentine situation with him in this conversation, much as I would have liked to do so, as I had had long conversations with Castillo Nájera, in which I had set forth our point of view as I knew it, and I thought it would be better not to talk with the President until Castillo Nájera had

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The Honorable  
Spruille Braden,  
Assistant Secretary of State,  
Washington, D. C.

had a chance to talk with him. It so happened, however, that in the conversation with the President, I remarked that the Argentine situation was giving me, and of course my Government, a great deal of concern, and that I hoped to talk it over with him in the near future.

The President thereupon immediately began to speak about the Argentine situation and spoke at considerable length. He started out by saying that the developments in the Argentine situation had been closely followed by him and were also giving him great and constant concern. He said that his principal preoccupation was and had always been the maintenance of complete inter-American unity and collaboration which, in his opinion, was indispensable for the present and for the future, and constantly more so. He saw a great danger that this unity might be seriously menaced.

He then went on to say that the Argentine elections had been carried on in such a way that there was, in his opinion, no recourse except for the American Republics to recognize the election of Perón, whose election seemed to be certain. He said that if these elections were not all that we might wish them to be, that there was no basis on which we could refuse to recognize the result of the elections as valid, and if Perón was declared elected, we would have to recognize the results of the election as valid. I may say that two or three times during the course of his long remarks on the Argentine, he repeated this same statement, so that I think we may take it for certain that so far as the President is concerned, this will be a very definite attitude of his and will likely be, and I should say I believe will certainly be, the attitude of Mexico. In matters of foreign policy the final decision has always been with the President here, and I do not believe that anything could change his attitude in this respect.

The President then went on to say that there was no doubt that Soviet Russia was planning to establish close relations with the Argentine and that there was a great possibility of the Argentine being in a position where it would accept collaboration with Soviet Russia. He said that there were already indications of Soviet activity in this connection. He said that there were already indications of Argentine receptivity to such activity. He said that this Argentine receptivity--that is, of the Perón Government--must be considered at least in a measure as

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a defensive measure by the Argentine against our attitude and that of some of the other American Republics.

He went on to say that the British had not played a helpful role in this Argentine situation and, in his opinion, were not likely to do so. He said that we could easily find the extraordinary situation in which both Soviet Russia and England were playing with the Argentine Government, with the inevitable result of disrupting inter-American unity and collaboration. He said that the situation between England and Soviet Russia, and their differences in other matters would not interfere with both countries playing the dog in the manger in the Argentine situation, as both of them felt it in their interest to break up inter-American collaboration. At least, so far as England was concerned, she felt it in her interest to strengthen the Argentine Government and its aspirations for position and leadership. Mistaken as this policy of England was, we knew it was the policy she was following and he did not see any action which we had taken which had changed the British position in this respect. As I said at the outset of this letter, I had not intended to discuss the Argentine situation with the President during this conversation, much as I would have liked to do so, but in view of the President's statements above set forth, I felt it necessary that I do so. I set forth, therefore, at considerable length our views and attitudes and my own personal conviction with respect to the soundness thereof. I said that I did not see how we could sign a defense pact with the present Argentine Government or any growing out of it which contained Farrell-Perón elements and which had had this proved contact with the enemy. I said that we had made our position known on this aspect to Mexico and to the other American Governments and that I was in agreement with this position out of my own analysis of the situation and my conviction.

The President said that he would like me to listen to his views, and went on to say that, in his opinion, we ought not only to recognize the result of the Argentine election if Perón is elected, but that we should have the Rio meeting and proceed with the arrangements for the defense pact, and I inferred from this that he meant, including the Argentine. He said that distasteful as this might be, it was the only way he saw out of the impasse. It was the only way that he saw to get an eventual development in the Argentine in the right direction and the elimination, in due course, of these elements in the Government.

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It might take time but we would have at least the hope and a reasonable assurance of getting a proper situation in the Argentine in a reasonable time. If we did not recognize the results of the election, if Perón is declared elected, and if we did not go ahead with the Rio meeting in the not distant future, and with the defense arrangements in this Hemisphere, we would be giving Soviet Russia and England the opportunity to work in the Argentine and to consolidate a situation there which would last for a long time. He said that the isolation of the Argentine which would be the result of non-recognition, or not proceeding with the defense arrangements, would give free play not only to these Soviet and British influences, but would also practically force the Argentine Government to accept such collaboration, which would have the inevitable result of isolating it from a part of the American Republics and from us.

Before I could inject any remarks in this connection, the President went on to say that he had just received a letter from one of their Consuls in the Argentine, a man in whom he had a great deal of confidence, and of whose judgment and integrity he was assured. He said that this Mexican Consul had told him in this letter that he had just had dinner with Farrell and Perón and that they had made it very clear in their conversation with him that they desired a rapprochement with the United States. They had said to this Mexican Consul that they were in a very difficult position and they were willing to go a long way to bring about that rapprochement. The President then started to look for this letter in a drawer in his desk, but he did not find it and he said he must have it in his desk in another private office. I remarked to the President at this point that Farrell and Perón had probably indulged in a good deal of conversation of that kind with various people, and the President said that it was likely that they had. He said that he was convinced that although there might be a lack of sincerity in what Farrell and Perón had said to this Mexican Consul and to others, that he was sure that if there was a way open to them to integrate themselves into the American system and to compose their difficulties, they would have to take it and would be prepared to take it, for it was really the only path for them to follow. He said that this might be as bitter a pill for Farrell and Perón and their associates to swallow as it might be for some of the rest of us.

I then took the opportunity to make a rather long statement of our position as I know it, to the President,

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and told him that public opinion in the United States was practically unanimously with the attitude of the Department of State. I told him that it was almost impossible for my Government, which had taken the lead in so great a war and with such great sacrifice for the establishment of certain principles, to enter into a defense agreement with this present Government or any containing Farrell-Perón elements. The President said that he thoroughly understood this situation, but that unfortunately we had a very concrete and practical problem to deal with. He said that we had to choose between two courses. We had to choose between the course which gave us a possibility and probability of integrating the Argentine into the American system or follow a course of isolating the Argentine and make it possible for Soviet Russia and England to strengthen that position of isolation and to make the Argentine a definite trouble-maker in this Hemisphere and a center of all kinds of activities aimed, on the one hand, at our institutions and on the other hand at inter-American unity. He himself believed that we had only one course to follow because it offered the only chance by not giving Soviet Russia and Britain this opportunity.

At this point I said that, speaking personally, as I did not yet know the attitude of my Government, I did not like the idea of recognizing the results of this election, which were certain to be proclaimed as a victory for Perón. I said that it was a difficult thing for me to compromise with principle, and I was getting a little too old to change. I said that I had found that it was extremely dangerous to compromise with principle. These Argentine elections had been played as a perfect farce, and perhaps no comedy had every been better and more successfully acted before the world. It was practically impossible, however, for me to reconcile myself to the idea of my country or the other American Republics recognizing this farce, but I realized that it had been played so perfectly that the situation we were confronted with was most difficult.

The President then said that he, too, did not like compromising with principle and that he and his country were not accustomed to compromise with principle. So far as these elections were concerned, they were probably as well conducted and as valid as any which had taken place in the Argentine. He did not see how Mexico or we could have any basis for not recognizing the election as valid. We would not, in his opinion, be compromising with principle any more than we had in the past.

I then said that I thought we ought to consider very seriously that by recognizing the election of Perón we would be taking all heart out of the sound elements in the Argentine and that we would be destroying their hopes, and disillusioning sound people not only in the Argentine but in other countries. I recalled to the President that the many friends whom he had in the Argentine were certainly not supporters of Perón and of the things for which he stood. The President said that this was quite true and he was sure many of the people who may have actually voted for Perón really were not for Perón, or for what Perón had stood for. He said that even if the majority of the people in the Argentine were against Perón, and certainly not for the things for which he stood, these same people had had a chance to make themselves felt during the last few years, and they had done just absolutely nothing. The President said this with a certain sense of bitterness because he has many friends in the Argentine and he, like many others, I know had hoped that there would be some strong reaction against the Argentine regime. The President continued by saying that the right thinking people in the Argentine had done just nothing; that the Army was behind the Government still; that a considerable section of labor was behind it; and that even a certain section of capital was behind it. He repeated that the Argentine people had had every chance to get rid of this regime on several occasions and had done nothing about it. Under these circumstances, we could not expect any strong reaction against the Perón Government in the immediate future to the extent of eliminating it, and if we isolated the Argentine because of the "election" of Perón, we would be merely strengthening Perón and strengthening certain attitudes which he had assumed and would give him a chance to consolidate himself. He returned to the thought previously expressed by him, that by isolating the Argentine, in whatever way we did it, we were giving a free field to Soviet Russia, which was already becoming so active, as well as to England, which had not played a happy role there, and we would be practically forcing Perón to seek friends outside of this Hemisphere.

He went on to say that he had given this matter a great deal of thought from every point of view, and from every point of view that he had examined the Argentine situation he felt that there was more hope in a conciliatory attitude than in isolating the Argentine. He said that by a conciliatory attitude he was convinced that Perón could not last very long, as certainly the Argentine people were not in favor of autocratic military Government and of fascist

ideas. The



The unfortunate thing was that they had had a chance in the last few years to get rid of the regime, but had been supine. Now at least there had been elections, and there would be a Congress, and there would be minority representation, and there would be immediately some return to democratic processes. If we assumed a negative attitude if Perón is elected, we would destroy even this possibility because Perón would undoubtedly, if isolated, have to maintain the strongest kind of arbitrary attitudes and would turn to extra-Hemisphere powers for friendship.

The President said that he had always been interested in talking with me about the Argentine and in hearing my points of view and those of our Government, and he recognized the sincerity of our position and he was not disputing the wisdom thereof. He was only trying to tell me that he too had been giving this problem much thought during the last years and that he was expressing to me his views with the same sincerity and frankness that I had expressed mine. He was convinced that if we wanted to see favorable developments in the Argentine, we would have to look to the play of normal factors, and that this play of normal factors which would bring about eventually a proper situation in the Argentine and a return to democratic processes would not be aided by isolating the Argentine.

I need not tell you that these attitudes of the President greatly depressed me, but they did not come as a complete surprise. I have, in my reports and despatches to the Department, consistently told it that the President of Mexico has not been in accord with the general policy towards the Argentine regime. I have said that he does not like it any more than we do and that he recognizes the danger of it to neighboring countries and to the American system, but that he believes that a different policy has to be followed in handling it. If you will go back into the files, you will find that when Padilla was Foreign Minister, then Secretary Hull several times insisted with me that I get Padilla, for Mexico, to make some strong statements with regard to the Argentine regime. Padilla was prepared to make them but frankly told me that he could not because if he did it would be without the President's approval, which would mean his resignation and he felt that it was more important for him to stay in the position of Foreign Minister as long as Mexico was following a general policy which was in accord with ours. You will recall that in

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connection with the Mexico City meeting and the San Francisco meeting Padilla was blamed for a lot of things, but after all, a Foreign Minister cannot do things without the authority of his President.

I have talked with the President of Mexico any number of times on the Argentine situation and I have, I am sure, I need not tell you, presented our point of view with force and with clarity, and with frankness. I have been in complete agreement with our policy and therefore could put all the weight of my personal conviction into what I have said in the Foreign Office and to the President.

At the end of the conversation, the President said that he had considered all the things which I had said from time to time to him and in the Foreign Office, and that he understood thoroughly the position of our Government. He said that, however, he was expressing to me the views which were the result of the thought which he had given to the problem continuously and that he wanted me to know that the main factor which influenced him was the preserving of inter-American unity and collaboration, the keeping out of extra-Hemisphere influences, and the return of the Argentine to normal democratic practices. He said that while the views which he had expressed to me were his carefully considered views up to now, he was not as yet expressing them as the views of the Mexican Government. He said, however, that he had given this matter so much thought from the idealistic and the practical point of view that he had very deep convictions as to the practical course we had to follow to reach our objective, and he said that our objective must be to maintain American collaboration and to keep out extra-Hemisphere influences.

He repeated that, in his opinion, if Perón is declared elected, we should recognize the results of the election as valid. He said that we should endeavor to carry on more normal relations with that Government, in the hope of bringing them to a cordial basis. He said that he thought we should not put off the Rio meeting too long, and I gathered the impression, although he did not say so, that we should bring the Argentine into the defense arrangements. He is convinced that if Perón is declared elected, he will have to change his course and that if we do not isolate him, that Perón will begin to make appropriate approaches. He said of course that if we recognize Perón and then treat him like a pariah, we will not get anywhere. He said that the course of gradually establishing cordial

relations



relations will be the surest way of keeping out foreign influences from this Hemisphere because Perón will then not have any need of soliciting or accepting extra-Hemisphere help and he himself will become interested in excluding the elements which he is presently harboring and has, so far, favored.

I was not clear as to what the President had in mind with regard to the Rio meeting, except that he felt that it should be held before too long and that the meeting would be the best place and the best means of making the elected Perón Government understand that it cannot expect the normal and cordial relations with the other American Republics which it may desire, unless it brings its practices into accord with those principles for which we have declared ourselves. I gathered that the President had in mind that the Rio meeting could be used to bring pressures on the Argentine Government and that it would be the sort of meeting in which the Argentine Government could make the steps towards rapprochement.

I said to the President that what he had said to me had caused me a great deal of concern, as there was so much divergence between his point of view and mine and those of my Government. I said that I remained convinced of his understanding and his sincerity, and because I knew his attachment to inter-American collaboration and to certain principles, I naturally had to give to his views that weight which must be given to them. I said that I would of course bring his views to the attention of my Government.

I think I should say that the President expressed his ideas in a really statesmanlike manner and to me there was no question of his sincerity. I have always been convinced of President Avila Camacho's sincerity and I am convinced that his views expressed to me in this conversation and set forth in this letter, are not governed by a friendly spirit to the Argentine regime or even a desire to be gentle with the Argentine, but that they grow out of his conviction that it is the feasible course to follow which will bring us to our objectives.

In the first part of the conversation we had discussed the question of workers going to the United States. As you know, this program has been made possible so far as Mexico is concerned by the attitudes of the President. The continuance of the program, in spite of many difficulties so far as Mexico is concerned, is assured because of the

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firm and statesmanlike attitude of the President. I am not going into detail, but the President said that in spite of the statements made by American politicians and Mexican politicians, this question of workers going to the United States was with him a matter of principle and collaboration, as it had been in the war, and it would remain so now. He hoped that in my country those responsible in Government would be as little concerned over politicians, etc., as he was by such statements made here but that both sides would keep in mind the fundamental principles involved in this movement of workers and the collaboration between the two countries. I mention this part of the conversation with respect to workers because I must say that the President has continuously handled this question of the workers in a statesmanlike way and in a most understanding spirit, and if he were not attached to certain principles he would not have taken the attitudes in this respect that he has taken.

You can imagine that the conversation with the President with respect to the Argentine has given me a great deal of concern and it came as a shock, and I know it will cause concern in the Department. I was not able to see Castillo Nájera today to tell him about my conversation with the President as he went to Cuernavaca for a rest over the week-end. I understand, however, that Castillo Nájera is to see the President on Monday, the 18th, and I will see him shortly thereafter. I am informing you in a separate letter that Castillo Nájera is going to the meeting of the Security Council and will be leaving here about or on March 21 or 22, and you will probably be seeing him while he is in the United States.

I am not sure to what degree Castillo Nájera shares the views which the President expressed to me as reported in this letter. I have reported to you my recent conversations with Castillo Nájera in the letters mentioned at the beginning of this letter, but you will recall that in reporting on these conversations with Castillo Nájera, I stated that he was expressing his personal views still and not those officially of the Mexican Government.

The President made it very clear to me at the close of our conversation that he was not yet expressing the views of the Mexican Government but, in view of the frank manner in which we had always talked, he had expressed

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to me with complete frankness and as clearly as he could, the thoughts which he had on this important situation. He said that there were some phases of the matter that he had not thought through but that we would most likely be seeing each other shortly and he would not fail to give me the results of his further reflection.

Knowing my views as you and the Department do, you will realize that this has been a painful letter for me to write, but I have faithfully set forth the conversation with the President. All I can say is that I am sure that he is sincere in his views, and I think that even though the Foreign Office may differ with him with regard to some of the views expressed, in the main the President's views, as set forth in this conversation, will represent the attitudes of Mexico which we will have to deal with.

I shall not fail to keep you informed of any further developments. I have thought it best to send you this information in an informal and secret letter rather than in a despatch.

With all good wishes,

Cordially and faithfully yours,

GSM/ceer

George S. Messersmith