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AIR MAIL

CONFIDENTIAL

Habana, Cuba,
March 28, 1941.

Dear Philip:

I was very glad to have your note of March 24th. I note with interest that you showed my letter, with regard to the activities of Dr. Ferrara in Spain, to Mr. Welles. As I told you, I doubt whether Ferrara's stay in Spain will be much prolonged, certainly not on any mission or business of the Cuban Government. Cortina's friendship with Ferrara does not go far enough to enable him to condone the activities in Spain in which Ferrara is undoubtedly engaged. I think Ferrara's general position in Cuba and trouble-making capacity here has so much decreased that it is no more a matter of any real concern to the Government whether he is in Cuba or not. In other words, I think Ferrara's star has set. An interesting sidelight in this connection is that when Mrs. Warren Robbins was here some days ago she saw Mrs. Ferrara who said that she did not think that her husband "would remain in Spain much longer".

While I have seen Cortina continuously, he has not mentioned the Spanish note to Cuba, nor the Cuban note to Spain, concerning which I reported at length recently. I assume the Cuban note has gone and the question of a break of relations is up to Spain. I will inform myself fully on this tomorrow morning when I see Cortina, and if there is any change in the situation from that reported in my recent despatch, I will let you know. I feel sure, however, that the Cuban note has gone and that it went in the terms I indicated in my despatch. As I told you, I feel sure that now that the matter of a break of relations is squarely up to Spain, she is not likely to take any action. Recent developments in Europe and in our own country, as well as the information they must get from this part of the world would not encourage them in a break of relations unless Spain has no longer any power of decision whatever left and is acting completely and solely on orders from Berlin. The Spanish Government knows what a bad effect a break with Cuba would have, not only here, but in the other American Republics and if it should come to a break, you may be sure the Cuban Government would fully inform all of the other American Governments of the full circumstances.

I have noted with particular interest the second paragraph of your letter and in which you express an interest in my views with respect to the effectiveness, or ineffectiveness, of the Spanish effort through the

Falange

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Falange to promote authoritarian ideologies, etc., in the American Republics. I am not able to speak with authority or definiteness with regard to the other American Republics outside of Cuba. While I keep in as close touch as possible with developments in the other American Republics, in order to keep my perspective, and to know how to interpret certain things here, I naturally do not have the opportunities which you have for intimate information on developments among some of our other friends, but I do follow this situation here very carefully. The Italian effort here has, at no time, been very active nor effective. The number of Italians here is small. The Italian Minister is not, at heart, a Fascist and, although a very amiable person, he moves mostly in certain "select" Spanish circles and is not taken seriously - even in these circles which he frequents. Barletta, the Honorary Italian Consul General who is also the distributor of the General Motors for Cuba, has been the spearhead of the Italian activity here and he has withdrawn into a shell somewhat recently because of our own program involving the elimination of anti-democratic alien representatives of American firms. The Italians have not engaged in much direct propaganda, but have worked mainly by collaborating with the Germans, the Japanese and the Spanish, and have of course endeavored to help in starting up Communist activity and in aiding it in any form they could. On the whole, however, the Italian effort has not been harmful here at all, and so far as its effects are concerned practically negligible.

The Japanese effort has been more effective than the Italian, but is also carried on very discretely. The Japanese Chargé here has, I believe, a Chilean wife and for that reason he has been able to go out a bit more than the German. He gives large entertainments from time to time at his house and, as you know, there are a certain number of people in every Capital who would go to a diplomatic house even if the devil lived there. This rather wide entertaining of the Jap therefore means exactly nothing. The Japs have been active in the sense that they have been bringing in propaganda literature, not on any considerable scale, but in the form of brochures which they circulated among the better elements in the Island. The principal activity of the Japanese here is that they are using their Legation in Habana as a means of communicating with their other Legations in South America. The Jap here receives a considerable number of cablegrams from the Japanese Embassy in Washington, and whenever he receives such cablegrams, the receipt is usually followed with a series of telegrams to other Japanese Missions in South America. The Post Office here, too, has indicated that the Jap here has a rather large correspondence with other Japanese Missions in South America. The Jap, of course, works closely with the German, the Italian, and the Spanish, and to a certain degree with the Swede. There are so many more Chinese than Japanese in Cuba, and the Chinese Minister here is a very active and intelligent little man. He has his people over the Island watching the Japs so closely that this has been a great handicap to the Japanese. I would say all in all that the Japanese direct effort here has been ineffective

ineffective and that the only thing which need concern us about the Japanese here is that they are using their Mission here as a means of communication. If things get even tighter than they are now in the general picture, we will wish to know more about this, and I am sure the Cubans will cooperate with us.

Before I leave the question of the Jap, I should tell you that we have noticed the rather curious fact that Vice President Cuervo Rubio and his wife seem to be consorting more with the Japanese than does any other member of the Cuban Government. Whenever the Japs have a big party or a dinner, the Cuervo Rubios seem to be there. I have never been able to explain this satisfactorily, and I am going to go into it more definitely now that I have learned that the other day when three Japanese officers came here from the United States, Cuervo Rubio is said to have entertained them for lunch. These officers were here for only a short time and left again for the United States. I assume they are Japanese officers connected in some way or other with the Japanese Embassy.

The German Legation has been the most active and the most effective. Their activities over the radio have been stopped through the recent decree which prohibits anti-democratic radio broadcasts and propaganda. They paid for several radio hours which are now out. Others which they undoubtedly paid to give an unfriendly tinge to their broadcasts have now turned around and are very friendly towards us and England. The Germans had a big organization of some seventy people, mostly German business men here in Habana, preparing propaganda material for distribution all over the Island. Most of this was not of an effective character, but it was a definite nuisance. This has almost entirely stopped and, under the new decree, the Post Office will not distribute this propaganda material. The German Minister works entirely in the background. He is practically never seen. He controls the Italian and the Swede. In spite of his personal antipathy for the German, the Italian is obliged by his Government to work and consort with the German. It is quite clear from various things which we have seen that the German pulls the strings and the Italian, the Jap and the Swede react. The Germans throughout the Island are mostly engaged in business and are very largely dependent upon the supplies from the United States. These business men were very active. They have become much less so. There are few German sympathizers among the Cubans except those in the Falange. While I would say that, to a large extent, the teeth of the Germans have been pulled here, they are potentially still the most dangerous element next to the Falange. I neglected to mention that the German Legation has undoubtedly been aiding the Communists in direct and indirect ways.

The Swedish Chargé here is a pitiful creature without personal prestige, but with a wife who is, I believe, a Russian and obviously not well balanced. She has social ambitions to a degree which make her ridiculous, and of course there are a certain number of people who frequent their house, but this means

nothing

nothing in the real picture. The Swede has lost all prestige and he is so obviously under the thumb of the German.

The Belgian and the Norwegian Chargés maintain a very proper attitude and have refrained from any contact with the totalitarian representatives either openly or secretly.

The French Minister here, Barois, has no personal prestige. The French in Cuba with very few exceptions are against the Vichy Government and they look to the former Chargé, Grousset, who is now the Secretary of the Legation, as their representative. The Frenchman came here from Venezuela, as you will recall, at the time of the Habana Conference very hurriedly and made himself ridiculous by trying to have himself named as an observer at the Conference, and also by forcing himself into the space reserved for the American Delegates to the meeting on several occasions. His wife is a rather ridiculous person who is very socially ambitious and who is constantly giving parties which are frequented for the most part by persons who do not count in the picture here. As a matter of fact the constant appearance of the Italian Minister at the Casino and other night clubs and the strange entertaining and publicity sought therefor by the Frenchman and the Swede have made them objects of ridicule.

I have given you this general picture with regard to the elements concerned, other than the Spanish and Falange, so that you may know this situation has developed rather satisfactorily. All the propaganda of these people has led to practically nothing; all of the money they have spent has been ineffective; their prestige has steadily gone down, and their aid to the Communist party has not helped it in the long run for it, too, seems to be on its last legs.

And now for the specific question you put to me. I think it can be safely said that the position of the Falange in Cuba, and of the present Spanish Government, is weaker than at any time during the last years. The Spanish Chargé d'Affaires here, Count Espelius, is very quiet, reserved and proper. He is a gentleman. I think his parents were born in Cuba. He has behaved so well under difficult circumstances, and has conducted himself with such discretion and tact that he is well regarded generally. I doubt whether he is very much of a Fascist and certainly no friend of Germany. While as a Spaniard, he would undoubtedly like to see Spain regain control of Cuba, and regain her prestige in South America, yet I do not believe he has any illusions in this respect, nor that he would encourage his Government in any such aspirations. That, I am sure, is why the Spanish Government tried to send Riestra here as Consul General. Espelius, however, has lost face because his Government recently obliged him to make a statement with regard to the deep sentiment between Cuba and Spain, which statement was so utterly wrong in its effects that Espelius would not have made it on his own. Espelius, of course, has had to play with the Falange, but he has tried to emphasize its philanthropic activities in caring for needy Spaniards here. We may take it for

granted

granted that nothing which Espelius says has very much influence with the Spanish Government and that it listens much more to certain Spaniards in Cuba than it does to him.

The Falange has been active and did have some 50,000 adherents some time ago according to the best reports we could get. Most of the membership was made up of small people who could contribute nothing to the Falange movement except their names on the local lists. Many of the leading Spanish merchants not only were members but gave liberally to the Falange fund, of which undoubtedly the greater part went to the feeding of needy Spaniards. The Falange has not engaged much in the distribution of actual propaganda material originating in Cuba. The material which they distributed came in large lots on practically every Spanish steamer which came in. This has now been stopped, as you know, and all Spanish propaganda coming in on these steamers is seized in the Customs and destroyed. The reports which we get from the rest of the Island are, for the most part to the effect that the Falange is less, rather than more, active and that Spanish merchants and influential Spaniards are either dropping it wholly or becoming much more lukewarm. I am not able to give you the real reason for this. I think the principal reason is the increasing knowledge here, among important Spaniards, of the real situation in Spain and their real lack of sympathy with totalitarian Governments.

The Cuban Government does not take the Falange lightly. Under Pedraza, and now under Migoya, the Cuban Army is watching the Falange very closely. The Cuban Government knows that Cuba has the largest Spanish population of any of the American Republics. There still are 200,000 Spanish citizens in Cuba and, too, 120,000 Spaniards who have become naturalized but who are still more Spanish than Cuban for the most part. The Cuban Government is alive to the fact that there is not as large a Spanish population in any one of the other American Republics to the South. It realizes that the Franco Government is definitely endeavoring to use the Spaniards here as the spearhead of the Falange for making trouble in the Latin American Republics. In this respect, the Spanish Government does not need the pressure from Germany, for if Alfonso XIII had his aspirations for regaining control of South America and Cuba, it is not difficult to see that the Franco Government should have them in this exaggerated form. Add to this situation which we must recognize, the German pressure which we know to be real, and the sum is a situation which cannot be neglected.

The Spanish effort in Cuba has had very little effect on the Cuban population. Your estimate of the situation in this respect is in complete accord with my own. The Spanish effort through the Falange had worked up these Spaniards in Cuba to a state of a low fever, but their efforts had no effect on the Cuban population except to arouse old feelings of resentments and hatreds. As a matter of fact, the activity of the Falange and of the Spanish Government in Cuba has been negative rather than positive so far as the Cubans are

concerned.

concerned, for in and out of the Government, the Cubans resent bitterly this Spanish activity. As I have indicated in this letter, the activities of the Falange are at the lowest ebb we have been able to observe during the past years. If it comes out that the Spanish Government has been threatening a break of relations with Cuba on such obviously trumped up grounds, it will be a real blow to the Falange.

The real danger in Cuba lies not in this German, Italian, Japanese and Falange activity, but in the activity of such a large part of the Catholic clergy. A good part of the Catholic clergy in Cuba are Spanish. They have been taught to believe that the Franco Government saved the Church in Spain. They believed that it was Hitler-Germany which saved the Franco Government and therefore the Catholic Church. From this, they reason that Hitler-Germany is the bulwark of the Catholic Church - contrary as this is to the facts. You and I know what the level of a good many of the lower clergy is, and how far from the realities are some of the higher clergy. Since the propaganda over the radio and through the mails has been stopped, the principal elements left, working in an anti-democratic direction in Cuba, are certain sections of the Catholic clergy and the Communists. I myself do not consider the activities of these Catholic clergy as dangerous, but it would be dangerous if we do not recognize that this is the situation. The Spanish Government until recently had the Spanish Catholic Church bringing more priests into Cuba from Spain by every boat that came in. There was so much resentment that this movement of priests has been almost entirely stopped.

While Cardinal Dougherty was here, and sometime back when Father Thorning and several priests were here, I brought this situation to their attention. I told them that I thought it was really most important that the Catholic clergy in the United States act towards getting some kind of effective information to the Catholic clergy in Cuba, and in others of the American Republics, as to the real attitude of the totalitarian Governments to the Church. I am convinced that the same situation which prevails in Cuba in this respect prevails in some, if not most of the other Republics to the South. It is a situation which I think we must recognize and which the Catholic Church in the United States should recognize. Without being an Englishman, I have always believed that the maintenance of the British Empire in some form was one of the bulwarks of civilization as we know it and want it. Without being a Catholic, I have always felt that the Catholic Church is a bulwark for much that we wish to preserve and consolidate throughout the world. It is not for me to pass judgment upon the attitude of the Vatican, but it would seem pretty clear that in a church in which there is so much discipline as there is in the Catholic Church

there

there must be a lack of adequate instructions and definitions from the Vatican to the Churches in this Hemisphere, or else we would not have this strange attitude of so many of the lower clergy. The result of this equivocal attitude is that many of the lower clergy believe that Hitler-Germany is really the bulwark and protector of the Catholic Church!

I have mentioned this matter of the Church because in a large measure the factor of the Church is more important in the Falange than is the Spanish Government and its aspirations in this Hemisphere. Take out of the Falange the support of the clergy, and indirectly that of the Church, and it has left nothing behind it but this empty dream of Spanish aspirations towards domination of the American Republics to the South of us, which aspirations the great majority of the Spaniards in this Hemisphere know are unrealistic and to which they themselves are antagonistic in a large measure. If the Falange has nothing behind it but the sounding cymbals of "Arriba", and of that press in Spain, and this new organization in Spain fostered by the Spanish Government for the promotion of its relations with the American Republics, then the Falange has nothing left to it which has any appeal to people in these countries.

I have confined myself largely to commenting on this problem in Cuba as it is the situation which I know. If we take care of the Falange we go a long way towards taking care of the situation so far as Spain is concerned in this Hemisphere. I think I can safely say that the teeth of the Falange in Cuba have been very much dulled in the last months.

I have not touched in this letter on the Communist situation. The Communists have been getting their backing in the way of money and encouragement from the German, Italian and Japanese Legations here, and from Communist sources in the United States. They have had, as you know, a certain support from President Batista as a result of the strange combination he made with them before the election. The Japanese, Italian and German aid is still there but less effective. The Communist support from the United States is still there, but I think it is decreasing so far as funds go. President Batista is increasingly embarrassed by his Communist alliance and, I believe, has reached the point where he is anxious to get out of it if he can find some one to pull his chestnuts out of the fire. You will know that the Veterans in Cuba have seized the opportunity given them by Blas Roca's attack on them, and are waging a furious combat against the Communists with the end of having the party declared illegal. I have reason to believe that one of the leading papers here (the Marina) will support this definite action, and that at least one, or two, others will join in it. It is not unlikely that in the near future a bill will

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be introduced in the House of Representatives to declare the party illegal. If they get started there is a good chance that the Congress will approve the measure. There is reason to believe that the Government is using the Veterans as the spearhead to get this action. I am, of course, keeping entirely apart from this matter as it is one of pure internal action in Cuba. There is only one consideration which I think we have to keep in mind in this connection, and that is that even though we may not wish to take any such action in the United States against the Communist party, we should not, I believe, do anything to discourage such action which Cuba may wish to take. The problem for Cuba in this connection is entirely different; for us the Communist party presents no danger. In Cuba it is a potential danger as it is in several other of the American Republics.

This is a very long letter, but I hope that it may give you this picture adequately. I am sending you several copies of the letter in case you wish to bring it to the attention of Mr. Welles and others in the Department.

With all good wishes,

Cordially yours,

George S. Messersmith.

GSM:fm.