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AIR MAIL

Personal

Habana, Cuba,
Dec. 20, 1940.

Cherwell

Dear Sumner:

Supplementing my confidential letter to you of December 16th with regard to the mention being made here of Conchoso as the most probable candidate for appointment as Cuban Ambassador to Washington, and our conversation over the telephone this morning, I now have to give you the following developments.

Cortina called me on the telephone last evening to say that he wished to see me this morning on a matter of importance. Following my conversation with you over the telephone this morning, I had a two-hour conversation with Cortina. He said that the President had given him instructions to ask me to convey to our Government the request for the agrément of Conchosa as the Cuban Ambassador to the United States.

At this point, I took occasion in accord with our conversation over the telephone this morning to say to him how important we considered it to be in these days that the United States have in Cuba an Ambassador enjoying the full confidence of the Cuban Government and similarly how important it was that the Cuban Ambassador in Washington should be a man who could enjoy the most complete confidence of our Government. It was quite clear, however, that President Batista and the Cuban Government had made up their minds with regard to this matter and in accord with my conversation with you this morning I confined myself to saying that I would transmit the request for the agrément without delay. I am appending hereto a copy of my despatch No. 1334 of December 20, 1940, transmitting a request for the agrément.

Cortina then went into a long explanation of the reasons which impelled the Cuban Government to wish to send Conchoso. At the outset he wished to say that the President and he and certain other members of the Government had gone over the available persons with great care. There were all sorts of persons who wanted the position and most of them were, for one reason or another, unacceptable and particularly at this time. After having canvassed the whole field, the President and he were convinced that they could not send anyone to Washington at this time who would be more useful than Conchoso. He wished to assure me,

and I

The Honorable Sumner Welles,
Undersecretary of State,
Department of State,
Washington, D.C.

and I should say to you, that as Minister of State he had a very definite policy. This policy was one of the most complete cooperation with the United States in every respect, economic, financial, political and defense. You would realize that concerning his feelings with respect to our country, there was no question. He had been the one, against much opposition, to bring about the declaration of war by Cuba without any delay immediately after our declaration. That was as definite an indication of his basic policy as there could possibly be. He felt the same way about it now entirely irrespective of questions of loans or financial assistance. His policy could be described as follows:

- a. Complete cooperation with the United States in all matters affecting Cuban American relationships;
- b. Complete cooperation with the United States in its inter-American and Pan American policy, and following our lead in this policy;
- c. Complete cooperation in matters of defense of Cuba, of the United States, and of the Americas, to the degree that he himself was prepared to foster the use of his power to make the most complete treaty of military alliance for an indefinite period;
- d. That this policy was one which would be his entirely apart from all questions of loans or financial assistance.

As Minister of State he would be responsible here for the conduct of foreign policy and he could not be hampered by having as Cuban Ambassador in Washington some one who did not agree fully with these policies. At this point I interjected that it would be most important of course that the Ambassador was not only one who was carrying through instructions from his Government in connection with such policy, but also one who was attached personally to such policies as it would increase his usefulness and effectiveness if his personal views co-incided with those of his Government. Cortina replied that he had not lost sight of this important factor. In view of things which had been said concerning Conchese, he had during the last week been seeing a good deal of him outside of regular Cabinet business, had had him to lunch at the house and for long talks. He said that he had explored Conchese's mind in every possible way. He had given him what he called "psychological" tests because he wished to assure himself that he was not getting lip service but was getting at Conchese's real convictions. If was only after he had explored Conchese's mind in this way and after he had made inquiries in many quarters that he had indicated to the President that he was in agreement with the nomination of Conchese as Ambassador to the United States.

Cortina

Cortina said that after our conversation to which I referred in my confidential letter to you of December 16th, he had gone into these articles which Conchoso had written while Minister to Germany and which appeared in Carteles. He said that these articles were for the most part very objective. There was a certain sympathetic attitude by Conchoso to some aspects of the German educational program which was probably influenced by his knowledge of the lack of discipline in Cuba and the thought such were features of the German educational system which might be useful in Cuba. He did not consider these articles important as indicating any present state of mind or sympathy of Conchoso. It must be remembered that when these articles were written many things had not yet happened. At that time there were people in important places in England and in other countries who believed that a reconciliation with Germany was possible. Just as these people in England and in other countries had been shocked into a completely different state of mind, this was also certainly the case with Conchoso who today was as much opposed to Hitler and to all of his works as was he, Cortina.

With respect to Conchoso's alleged sympathies with Germany, and rumors with respect thereto, he had gone into this most carefully, with all kinds of people including some not so friendly to Conchoso. He could not find a single person who had any basis for believing that Conchoso was friendly to Germany or to the Axis. All seemed to go back to these articles in Carteles in 1936, and he believed it unfair and unjust and quite unreasonable to base any present action on those articles.

With respect to the paragraph in the President's message on foreign relations which I have referred to in several letters and in a despatch, and ~~in~~ which paragraph I had been informed was prepared by Conchoso, he could now give me further assurances to supplement those already given. He had told me the other day that Conchoso was not responsible for this paragraph but that President Batista himself had written it. As he wanted to be absolutely sure of his ground he had gone into this matter again and he had learned in the most definite fashion that Conchoso had nothing to do with this paragraph, and had in fact the same reserves with regard to it which he, Cortina, had. This matter too had been cleared up by the statement of the Prime Minister, Saladrigas, following the President's message, but he wanted to make it clear that Conchoso had had nothing to do with the wording of the paragraph.

With respect to Conchoso's actual feelings towards the United States, he was convinced that Conchoso was friendly and understanding even though he had not as much knowledge of the United States as might be desirable. He was a very intelligent man and a very industrious man and he could be depended upon to

learn

learn very rapidly. There was no doubt that the Cuban Government could depend on him to carry through to the best of his ability the program of cooperation as above outlined which was the policy of the Cuban Government. He had convinced himself that Conchoso was personally attached to this program and if he did not have that conviction he would not have been considered for the appointment.

With respect to Conchoso as a man, he said that it was correct that he was ambitious, but it was the natural ambition of a man to succeed. It was not an ambition which would lead him to endeavor to carry through personal policies. He could be depended upon to carry through the instructions he received and to be a faithful interpreter of the attitude of our Government. He was an honest man and he believed him to be a man of good judgment. He had had a lot of contact with Conchoso and he had found him to be a man who went into everything carefully and intelligently and painstakingly. There were some 17 or 18 members of the President's Council. Conchoso, as Minister of the Presidency, had to deal with them all and he had gained the respect and confidence of all of the Cabinet by his painstaking judicious work and by his endeavor. Often in Cabinet meetings it was Conchoso, when some of the members got up in the clouds, who brought them to the ground by recalling that the question at issue was so and so.

Conchoso, he said, had a perfect reading knowledge of English and a good speaking knowledge. He did not write English but this he would learn rapidly, and the lack of a writing knowledge would not be a handicap. He had a pleasant personality and his wife was a charming woman who knew how to keep her house and to receive. Conchosa was a family man who preferred his own wife and family to outside ventures and his personal life was very correct.

It was a great advantage that Conchoso had the complete confidence of the President with whom he was on the most intimate terms. He was on such intimate terms with the President that he differed with him freely and was a true friend in the sense that he told him disagreeable, as well as agreeable, things. It was the further advantage that he had the confidence of every member of the Government. Further, he was not tied to any particular party and was not politically ambitious in Cuba. He could be depended upon to be a good servant of the Government and not to serve any particular group or interest. He would not be scheming to try to carry through this or that, but would stick to his job.

Cortina would have liked to have, I am sure, a personal expression from me, and he said that it would be very disastrous, of course, for the agrément to be asked for one when he was not

acceptable.

acceptable. I made it clear that I could only pass on the request for the agrément and could not forecast the attitude of my Government.

In view of the foregoing, I think we have little room for any action except to express our agrément to the appointment of Conchese. There are others whom we would have preferred I am sure. I am ~~regrettably~~ led to the conclusion that perhaps on the whole we may be satisfied that certain persons who wanted the place, and who have brought pressure, have not been favorably considered. I do not know Conchese well and have had very little contact with him - so little that I can have no personal reactions of real value. One thing is clear and that is that the whole Government here wants Conchese. They feel that he will correctly interpret the Cuban position to us, and our position to Cuba. They feel that his desire will be to serve the Government rather than any personal interests. Under the circumstances I do not see how we have any course except to say that the appointment is agreeable to us.

Cortina said that in view of these rumors which had circulated with regard to Conchese's pro-German sympathies, etc., it was his intention, immediately after our answer had been received and is favorable, to have Conchese issue a very carefully worded statement here, which would remove all questions concerning him and the motives which would guide him in his work as Cuban Ambassador. This statement would be made immediately after his appointment could be made known so that it would stop any undesirable publicity here - which, however, in any event he did not anticipate. Cortina said further, that immediately on his arrival in Washington as Ambassador, Conchese would make a statement of such a character as to create confidence in him and his actuation, and Conchese's actuation would be such that he believed that he would rapidly on his arrival in Washington gain that confidence so necessary to the Cuban Ambassador.

Cortina said that, of course, it would be kept entirely between us here that the agrément had been asked for and he knew that nothing would be said about it at home until our answer was given. The Senate was recessing and it would probably be the middle of January before it would meet in special session for various matters and could confirm the appointment of Conchese, who would leave for the United States soon thereafter. Incidentally Cortina pointed out that the Government had taken account of the importance of the position in proposing as Ambassador one of the most important members of the existing Government and one who had the confidence of all the members of the Government and that it could not be considered as a political appointment. It was a sincere desire to send a man whom they felt would carry through his mission

in an

acceptable manner to the Cuban Government and to us.

It would be difficult to find any adequate substantiation of the alleged pro-German and pro-Axis sentiments of Conchoso. There are these articles in Carteles, but, as Cortina points out, these were written in 1936 when there were important men in England and in other countries who showed a similar understanding of certain aspects of the German régime. Much water had gone under the bridge since then and others had changed their minds, just as he was sure Conchoso had, if he had ever held these sympathetic ideas.

My own feeling is that there is no adequate ground on which to refuse the agrément for Conchoso, and that it would be unwise to refuse it. I have a strong suspicion that Conchoso was pro-German while he was Minister to Germany and, perhaps, for a short time after his return here to Cuba. He is a man who is greatly influenced by his surroundings. In fact, I believe this quality in his character may prove useful to us because I think he will be very much impressed by everything he sees at home and can become a very good friend. If we do agree to his coming, and of course we will know how to handle him, I am confident that he can be used in many ways to much greater advantage than some other persons. There isn't any doubt that he is very close to Batista, as is Mrs. Conchoso, and I get it from many sources that both of them are very frank with Batista. This can be very useful.

We could have hoped for some one better, but I believe that we can on the whole be pleased that it is he, especially when one considers what we might so easily have been asked to accept. My own thought is that since we do not have adequate grounds to refuse the agrément to Conchoso, and as there are reasons why he may turn out very well, it would be good policy to express our agrément very promptly as that will help very much in certain ways and it will help to clear up any misapprehensions. Any delay in granting the agrément would probably give rise to speculation of all kinds.

With every good wish,

Cordially and faithfully yours,
GEORGE S. MESSERSMITH.