

1431
AIR MAIL

*Done in his
Personal Copy*

Habana, Cuba,
Jan. 24, 1941.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I received in due course your circular telegram of January 16, 9 p.m., that you desired that the Governments of the other American Republics be fully informed regarding the developments in our foreign policy, particularly as it affects the situation in Europe. Immediately on the receipt of your telegram, I informed the Minister of State of the personal instruction which I had received from you, and he said that it was characteristic of you and your real spirit of cooperation that you would wish to keep the Cuban Government and the Governments of the other American Republics informed of our policy with respect to the situation which faced all of the Americas. We are working intensely on a sugar arrangement with Cuba, which is so important and necessary and which it now appears will be happily consummated in the near future. For this reason, it was not until last evening that the Minister could spare the time for the obviously long conversation which I would have to have with him following out your telegram.

I called on the Minister of State, Dr. Cortina, last evening at 6 o'clock and, using Radio Bulletins No. 8 of January 10 and No. 12 of January 15 as the basis, I explained to him the developments in our action and policy with respect to the European and Far Eastern situation. I set forth to him in detail the nature and objectives of the bill now before the Congress permitting our full aid for defense purposes. The Minister was exceedingly interested and we spent almost two hours in the discussion. The Minister showed very real comprehension of the bill now before the Congress and its objectives. He expressed deep admiration of the clarity and conciseness of your statement before the House Committee on Foreign Relations, which he considered a great state document.

He went on to say that, so far as Cuba was concerned, it was the decision of the Cuban Government to be with the United States at all times whatever the circumstances. He had on a number of occasions recently talked with the President, Colonel Batista, on this matter, and they were in agreement that for reasons of sentiment and interest Cuba must be with the

United States

The Honorable Cordell Hull,
The Secretary of State,
Washington, D. C.

United States, and share her fortunes with her in every respect. He recalled that when we declared war, during the previous World War, Cuba followed within a few days thereafter, and that it was he who had seen that this action was taken. If we should unfortunately be drawn into the war, Cuba would again within a few days be at our side.

He recalled to me that recently, through public and unequivocal statements of the Prime Minister, Dr. Saladrigas, the Cuban Government had defined its attitude as one of the most complete and full cooperation with us in the present situation. He said that this represented the views of the Cuban Government and of the overwhelming majority of the Cuban people. Once the present bill before our Congress had been passed, and the President had the powers granted therein, the Cuban Government would unquestionably wish to take some definite action aligning herself openly and completely with us in our defense program, and this would have to be through definite acts of the Cuban Government. It was the duty of Cuba, he said, to make available her ports, her territory, and the air above Cuba to us, and in any defense measures which we deemed it desirable and necessary to take. This action by Cuba would have to be independent of, and in no way related to, any action by our Government in the way of economic and financial aid to Cuba. The questions of economic and financial aid were entirely separate of defense measures and he had seen to it that, so far as Cuba was concerned, they would not in any way be connected. The ways in which Cuba could help were somewhat limited, but in whatever way she could help she must do so without any restriction and without any reserves. At the end of our conversation, the Minister asked me whether he could have a résumé of the bill and your remarks before the Committee as he would like to read them, particularly your statement before the House Committee. As I saw no reason for not doing so, I left with him the pertinent parts of Radio Bulletins No. 8 and No. 12. He said that he would report our conversation to the President and he was sure that your gesture in keeping them informed would be greatly appreciated by the President.

This morning, the Minister called me on the telephone to say that he saw the President last evening and that the President wished to see me at an early opportunity. I think what they have in mind is the making of some kind of a public statement in the not distant future based on your initiative in keeping them informed of our policy. Whatever they may say or do will, I am sure, be of a most satisfying character to us and helpful.

May I say that I think this action on your part, in asking the Chiefs of Mission to inform the Foreign Ministers of the other American Republics of the developments in our defense

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policy, will prove to be a most helpful one, and I can assure you that it has been genuinely appreciated here.

With all good wishes,

Cordially and faithfully yours,

GEORGE S. MESSERSMITH.

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