

AIR MAIL - COURIER

1569

Edm Welles

Mexico, June 3, 1943.

Dear Sumner:

As you know, Nelson Rockefeller has been here for some days, and by this time has returned to Washington and may have seen you. It was very pleasant to have him here, as it gave us an opportunity to discuss a number of matters affecting the Office of the Coordinator, and I am sure that his visit has been very useful.

The Office of the Coordinator, through the Institute of Inter-American Affairs, is interested in carrying through a health and sanitation program with the Mexican Government, working in Mexico through the Department of Public Health. They are planning in the main to carry through this collaboration with Mexico in the same way that they are already doing so in other countries of the Americas. I have been in conversation with the Foreign Office on this matter for some time and I reported quite fully to the Department in my despatch No. 10106, of May 12. In this despatch I expressed the reasons in detail why I believe it is in our interest to collaborate with Mexico in a public health and sanitation program. As I gave my reasons so fully in that despatch I shall not go into detail here. The importance of these programs to the other American Republics and to us was fully recognized in Resolution XXX of the Rio de Janeiro Conference to which we gave our adherence, and anything that we can do to help to implement this Resolution is, of course, desirable.

There is no thoughtful person in Mexico, and I believe no understanding person in our own country, who has given any thought to the industrial and agricultural development of Mexico, who does not realize that at the basis of any economic development of Mexico there must be an improvement in health and sanitation conditions among the great majority of the Mexican population.

Mexico,

The Honorable
Sumner Welles,
Under Secretary of State,
Washington, D. C.

Mexico, next to Brazil, has the largest area and the largest population of the other American Republics, and has in many ways the most serious problems affecting sanitation and public health. These grow out of the size of the population and out of the topographical and geographical conditions. There is probably no country in the Americas, with the exception of Brazil, in which this sanitation and public health work is so fundamental as it is in Mexico. For us the improvement of the sanitary and public health conditions in Mexico is even more important than it is in Brazil because of contiguity, as well as because of the fact that Mexico will never be a completely satisfactory neighbor until her economic condition very considerably improves and the present wide gap between our standards of living is somewhat reduced.

The importance of this problem is well recognized by the President of Mexico and by men like Padilla. I am sure that you have read Padilla's recent book, "The Free Men of America", and must have been impressed by the stress that he places throughout the book on the improvement of sanitary and public health conditions as a fundamental basis for the improvement of the economic conditions in Mexico and in the other Americas, for the improvement of the standard of living, for the development of democratic governments, and for the laying of an adequate basis for full and real and durable collaboration between the American states.

It is interesting that both in Brazil and in Mexico in many respects the greatest progress has been made in studying public health problems, as well as sanitation, and that increasingly research workers, technicians and doctors have been trained to cope with these problems, and institutions established to aid in solving them. Brazil has had the advantage of the collaboration of the Rockefeller Foundation over a number of years in its problems. While some work has been done by the Rockefeller Foundation in Mexico, it has been on an insignificant scale compared with that in Brazil, and Mexico has had to go ahead almost completely on her own initiative. It is interesting, however, to note that the collaboration between medical men in Brazil and Mexico with those in the United States is probably closer than between any other two countries, with the possible exception of Cuba.

About a year ago there was a plan on the part of the BEW, with the aid of the Office of the Coordinator, to start a program of collaboration in sanitation and public health so far as it affected workers in the rubber growing and rubber gathering sections of Mexico. At

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that time this Embassy had to take a very determined stand, first, because such a program, we realized, was not necessary, and second, that even if it was necessary it would be difficult to carry through. It was not necessary because the problem of rubber growing and rubber gathering in Mexico had been viewed in certain agencies in Washington in certain general and empiric terms and without any reference to the realities. I therefore stopped anything being done in this direction and the agencies concerned, which at that time were so much interested in it, have since changed their programs completely and put them on a more realistic basis, and realize that it would have been unwise to go ahead with such a public health and sanitation program in the rubber growing and rubber gathering areas in Mexico. As I have said, also, a program on a limited scale would have been impossible in Mexico, as it would have meant that we would be collaborating with Mexico in a program affecting an infinitesimal part of the population of Mexico, and the Mexican Government could not have undertaken a collaborative program in so limited a field affecting so small a part of its population when the problem for it of sanitation and public health is a broad one affecting all sectors of its people. The Mexican Government, therefore, with the best will in the world, would not have been able to collaborate with us in so limited a program, as it would have been politically impossible for it and would have created internally grave problems instead of settling any. All of this, however, is fortunately behind us and I merely mention it so that there be no misunderstanding as to my attitude. I was against such a limited and unwise program of collaboration, but I am for a broader program of collaboration such as that envisaged by the Office of the Coordinator through the Institute of Inter-American Affairs, and which is a real implementation of Resolution XXX of the Rio de Janeiro Conference.

Dr. Padilla and the Mexican Government have made it very clear that they would like to have any collaboration undertaken in the field of sanitation and public health on the basis of an exchange of notes rather than a direct arrangement between the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs and the Institute of Inter-American Affairs on the one hand, and an agency of the Mexican Government, such as the Department of Public Health, on the other. The Mexican Government feels that the basis of the collaboration lies in Resolution XXX of the Rio de Janeiro meeting and that therefore the collaboration, in whatever form it is carried through, should be on the basis of an exchange of notes.

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The Mexican Government also believes that the exchange of notes should recognize, in the spirit of Resolution XXX, that the collaboration is on a continuing basis, as it must be if it is to be carried through in the spirit of the Resolution. It realizes, however, that so far as any financial contribution by our Government is concerned in such a program, that the exchange of notes cannot commit us further than the amount which may be specifically mentioned in the note. I bring out this point because there is possibility of misunderstanding of the attitude of the Mexican Government among some of our people at home. When the Mexican Government wishes the principle of continuing collaboration recognized in the exchange of notes, it does so, I think, on very sound and reasonable grounds, for the nature of the geographic juxtaposition of our countries and the intimate relationship between sanitation and public health problems of the two countries makes the continuance of such collaboration desirable. This does not mean, however, that such continuing collaboration means continuing financial contributions by our Government, and I do not think that the Mexican Government views it in that way. They definitely understand that whatever sum of money may be fixed in the exchange of notes is the only financial obligation which we are undertaking.

The question of the amount of money which we will put into this program is, I think, of importance. I have gone into this fully in a despatch of which I send you a copy herewith, and I have discussed it fully with Nelson Rockefeller and General Dunham during their recent stay here, and undoubtedly Nelson Rockefeller will inform you of our conversations.

The Coordinator had set aside the amount of \$1,000,000 for collaboration in such a program in Mexico. In Brazil and in Chile we have agreed to put in \$5,000,000 respectively, and in some of the smaller countries less important in every respect we have agreed to put in double or more the sum of \$1,000,000. The Mexicans are fully familiar with what we have done. How they learned this I do not know, but they do know. I think it would be politically undesirable for us to enter into this program of collaboration in this field in Mexico if we are not willing to put in more than \$1,000,000, when we have put in so much more in the other countries. There has been a lot of talk about what we have done for Mexico and there has been an increasing feeling in certain quarters at home that we have played the fairy godmother to Mexico and I cannot find any basis for this at all. As a matter of fact, from the point of view of financial collaboration

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practically everything we have done in Mexico has been on a reimbursable basis, while what we have done in many of these other countries has been on a far different basis. I have very conscientiously gone into the facts as far as I know them, and it seems to me that we have done a great deal more in a financial way, including Lend-Lease, for other countries of South America much smaller and much less important to us for the present and the future, than we have done for Mexico.

If there is any basis for our Government lending its financial aid to these programs for collaboration in the field of sanitation and public health, and I believe there is, there is certainly a basis for this collaboration with Mexico. Such a program is fundamental in any improvement of the situation in Mexico, and any improvement in the situation in Mexico will make her in every respect a better neighbor of ours. I do not think it is too much to say that such a program of sanitation and public health is more important between Mexico and the United States than with any other country of the other Americas. Granted the foregoing, and taking into account the sanitation and public health problem in Mexico, the dreary and distressing details of which I will not go into here, it would seem to me that not only from the political point of view, but from the point of view of the importance of the work itself, we should allocate in the way of funds as much to Mexico as we have to Brazil and Chile.

I have discussed these phases of the matter with Nelson Rockefeller and General Dunham, who I think are in general accord with the ideas I have expressed, and they are specifically in accord that the amount should under no circumstances be left at \$1,000,000, but that the minimum should be \$2,500,000. I am definitely of the opinion that we should not approach the Mexicans for a final exchange of notes and carry it through unless we can put in the minimum amount of \$2,500,000. I personally think that we will be wise and prudent, for the near and the long range, if we will make it \$5,000,000. I wish to say frankly, however, that I do not think we should try to go ahead on the basis of less than \$2,500,000. I sincerely hope that it will be possible to make the amount \$5,000,000.

Nelson Rockefeller will tell you what he hopes to get from Congress, and if he gets the \$21,000,000 additional which he has asked for or anything approximating it, it should be possible to set aside \$5,000,000 dollars for this program in Mexico, and certainly the \$2,500,000 which I consider is the absolute minimum. As he will discuss

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these details with you and with Larry Duggan, I will not go further into this phase of the matter here, but I did wish you to know what is the result of my considered attention to this problem here.

Nelson Rockefeller will know before June 30 what amount of money he will have available to him for these programs. In the meantime we can proceed with the consideration of the text of the notes to be exchanged except so far as the amount of money on our part is involved. In the despatch which I am sending the Department (No. 10535, of June 2) and of which I am enclosing a copy, I have gone into this phase of the matter and am submitting several drafts for consideration.

I saw quite a good deal of General Dunham during the week that he was here and I learned to have very high regard for him. He seems to me unusually capable and sound, as well as understanding. I believe that it is fortunate that he is heading up this program for the Office of the Coordinator. If we set aside the sum of \$5,000,000 for this purpose, or a minimum of \$2,500,000, and again I repeat that I hope it will be \$5,000,000, as I think this will serve our interests best, the Institute of Inter-American Affairs is so organized that it can carry on this collaboration in actual projects over a period of three or four years, during which this money which is our contribution can be usefully expended, together with the monies which the Mexican Government will provide. In this connection I think it is important to bear in mind that the Mexican Government is already spending considerable amounts on sanitation and public health out of its very slender budget. I think you know that Mexico, with its 20,000,000 people, has a budget which in dollars is just about the same as that of Cuba, when Cuba has only 4,500,000 people. The Cuban Government is spending relatively little money on sanitation and public health. The Mexican Government, out of its very slender resources, is spending very considerable amounts on public health and sanitation already and is planning to spend more. I understand that the Department of Public Health alone has not less than 14,000,000 pesos set aside for it in the budget next year. You will see, therefore, that the Mexican Government will be prepared to make its proper contribution to this work in a collaborative program and that its financial burden in the program will be from the outset greater than ours. As a matter of fact I think that a careful examination of the situation in the other countries with which we have made such collaborative agreements will show that most of them are spending relatively less than Mexico already on programs of this kind, and that in some cases the only money, except very small

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sums, which will go into the programs, will be ours.

I would like to make it clear that I am not making a case for Mexico. I am making a case for ourselves. I am convinced that this program of collaboration in the field of sanitation and public health is as important for us as it is for Mexico. There is so much that I could say in support and proof of this, but I must not go into it further, as I know your full understanding of these problems.

I should add that the set-up with the Mexican Government is such that I think the collaboration of the Institute here will have to be through the Department of Public Health. The set-up within the Mexican Government is somewhat peculiar. There is a Ministry of "Asistencia Pública" headed by Dr. Baz, a very distinguished surgeon and one of the finest Mexicans I know, but the Ministry of Asistencia Pública is charged with hospitals and related work, and the Department of Public Health, headed by Dr. Manero, is the one which has to do with sanitation and public health. The Ministry of Asistencia Pública does not have anything to do really directly with these problems of public health and sanitation. I had the thought that it might be desirable to have the collaboration on our part carried through by the Institute of Inter-American Affairs with the Ministry of Asistencia Pública and the Department of Public Health. I discussed this quite informally and unofficially with the Under Secretary of Foreign Relations, Mr. Torres Bodet, who said that he did not believe that this would fit into the Mexican picture, in view of the fact that the Ministry of Asistencia Pública had to do only with hospitals, maternity work, asylums for the insane, feeble-minded, etc., and all such work which was of a purely internal character, and it did not have the international aspect that public health and sanitation work have, which are centered here in the Department of Public Health. While he did not altogether reject the idea of the possibility of the collaboration being with both departments here, he gave me clearly to understand that he thought that in the very nature of things it would complicate rather than help to have the collaboration through the two, and indicated pretty clearly that it would have to be through the Department of Public Health. After giving the matter further thought I think he is quite right and I think that is the basis on which we shall have to work.

I have hesitated to write you so long a letter on this matter in view of your many occupations and pre-occupations, but as we have only been thinking in terms

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of \$1,000,000, I have felt it necessary to bring these thoughts to your attention, as I feel so strongly that our financial contribution, as a one-time contribution (although expended over a number of years through the Institute), will have to be very considerably larger.

With all good wishes,

Cordially and faithfully yours,

G. S. Messersmith

Enclosure: Copy of despatch No. 10535, of June 2.

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