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AIR MAIL

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Buenos Aires, March 12, 1947

Dear Norman:

I have your letters of March 5 and March 6. I would like to write you at length, but I am really so busy these days that I find it almost impossible to keep up with the things that I have to do, and it leaves me little time for the more pleasant things such as personal correspondence or some of the amenities of life. It is only the importance of the task which I am trying to carry through here which keeps me going, and I am determined to see it through, because every day I realize more and more how important it is that there be understanding at home of the situation here and that the relations between the two countries be normalized.

Fortunately, I am feeling very much better. I try to keep in mind some of the advice with regard to diet which you gave me. The treatment which the New York doctors prescribed is very helpful. There is one thing, however, that is certain, and that is that the only way in which one can really cure any stomach ailment is by complete rest for a number of months. In any event, you will be glad to know that I feel better.

I think that one of the most distressing features of this whole problem with respect to the Argentine is the unhappy publicity which appears in some of the press at home. I am not referring to the statements made about me and my actuation by a few people at home, because I know that that is made with malice and intent. What concerns me is that even though a Chief of Mission may be well known at home, he is only known to a certain number of people, and to a relatively small number who read or hear what some of these writers and commentators say and improper and unfounded remarks with regard to one of our Chiefs of Mission can do a great deal of damage among a great many people who do not have any knowledge directly of the individual concerned. One would think that in these days which even a simple minded person must recognize are very

fateful.

The Honorable
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fateful, anyone who writes or talks would be measured in what he says.

I recently saw a transcript of a broadcast made by a rather well-known broadcaster at home in which he makes the statement that he had been, a few weeks before, in the office of a recently-inaugurated President in Latin America. I happen to know that the broadcaster in question has not been in the particular country for more than six months and yet in his broadcast he makes such a statement, I suppose to impress his hearers. The lack of accuracy in that statement is unfortunately characteristic of the inaccuracy of the other things which he says and yet he is heard regularly on Latin American affairs over one of the leading broadcasting systems at home. I do not like to be cryptic, but the broadcaster in question I thought was a friend of mine, and it is a real personal grief that a man in whom I had this confidence should let his prejudices carry him away so far from the truth.

With your letter of March 6, you send me a clipping from the Washington Post and one from the Washington Star, both covering articles by John Herling.

John Herling came to Buenos Aires in January with the A.F. of L. labor delegation. He told a member of my staff that he was doing free lance newspaper and magazine work and had been commissioned to write special articles on this trip to the Argentine for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and the Providence, Rhode Island Journal. He said that he might also do something for Life but had no definite assignment from that publication. He said that he had in mind several other outlets for his writings but would not follow them up until he returned to the United States.

Herling, at one time, was something like a labor consultant for the O.I.A.A., but I think his connection with that organization ceased in 1945 when that office began to disintegrate. He was, for some years, a secretary to Norman Thomas and has had some friends among A.F. of L. leaders. He seems to operate on the fringes of labor activity. He, himself, is an ardent socialist and is violent in his dislike and distrust for all things communistic, I am told.

He said to a member of my staff that he had just returned from a trip through Scandinavia, and that when he got to Washington, he learned of the projected trip of an A.F. of L. labor delegation to the Argentine and secured an invitation to join it.

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This is all I know of Herling, and to my knowledge I have never met him. There were three or four journalists who came here with this labor delegation, and I think Herling and a young woman who came with the delegation were the only ones who did not come in to see me during their stay. So far as Herling's article in the Washington Post is concerned, headed "Argentina's New 'Hero', Ambassador Messersmith Finds Himself in Center of Organized Anti-Braden Campaign", it is as full of misinformation and inaccuracy as possible, and it is impossible to even begin to comment on it. When he says that "So far as the Government of General Juan Domingo Perón is concerned, Uncle Sam is no longer the symbol of the United States. Uncle George has succeeded Uncle Sam and Uncle George is Ambassador George Strausser Messersmith", he is using his imagination and nothing else. I think some of the American correspondents here, as they did in Mexico, refer to me as "Uncle George", but so far as I have been informed, and I think I am pretty well informed, what Herling says is pure imagination on his part.

When Herling says that the "technique of flattery by mass demonstration has been brought to a high peak in Buenos Aires and Ambassador Messersmith recently received the full impact of such joy on returning to Argentina from the United States" he is completely misunderstanding of what happened, and in what follows utterly misrepresents what did happen. The facts briefly are these. When I arrived in Rio de Janeiro on my way south from Washington, I spent the night with Bill Pawley, our Ambassador, to break the journey. I arrived about 6:30 in the evening, and about 8:00, Sidney O'Donoghue, the Counselor of our Embassy in Buenos Aires who was acting as Chargé, called me on the telephone to find out whether I was arriving in Buenos Aires the next day or the day after. I told him that I was leaving the next day and he said that several of the Buenos Aires newspapers had been carrying articles to the effect that some labor organizations were thinking of making a big demonstration at the airport on my arrival. I told Mr. O'Donoghue to be good enough to tell the Foreign Minister that although he might not be able to do anything about it, I thought they should try to avoid such a demonstration as it would be misunderstood and misinterpreted by certain people at home.

I arrived at the airport at 8:00 the next evening and President and Mrs. Perón were there and the Foreign Minister, my wife and members of the Embassy staff. There was no crowd except perhaps half-a-hundred curious onlookers who probably had heard that the President was there. There was no demonstration and nothing of the sort that Herling writes about in this article in the Post.

The fact that President Perón was there was not a political gesture, but a friendly one. He is a very impulsive and a very naïve and very generous man in his reactions. Aside from the official relationship which we have on a friendly basis, he does feel that I am his friend, and like a Latin when he is a friend he goes the whole way. His real purpose in going to the airport when I left and meeting me when I arrived was really a friendly gesture.

The AP from Buenos Aires carried a dispatch which was published in the New York Times on my arrival and it went something like this. I do not have the exact wording before me, but it was almost textually as follows.

George S. Messersmith, the American Ambassador arrived at the Morón airport last evening and was met by President and Mrs. Perón and the Foreign Minister. On being reproached by Mrs. Perón for having been away longer than he had indicated, he replied, "I had to stay away longer than I intended for I found the situation very , grave".

When this dispatch came to my attention some days later through a clipping from the New York Times, I asked the AP head here how such a story had gone out when it was so utterly inaccurate. He replied that he himself had sent it out, but that he and none of his people had been at the airport and that he had got the information from an Argentine correspondent who was there. When I asked him to be good enough to check on this story, he did so and told me several days later that the Argentine correspondent who had telephoned this alleged statement of mine to him from the airport had not heard me make this statement but

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that someone else had heard me make it and had repeated it to the Argentine correspondent. Of course, I never made such a statement, but you can appreciate what an impression such a dispatch makes when published in a paper such as the New York Times.

I do not comment on the rest of what Herling says concerning my arrival in the Post article because it is completely inaccurate.

So far as what he says concerning the labor delegation which was here, I will comment briefly on that later in this letter, but what he says is just as inaccurate on the whole as what he said concerning my arrival.

The article by Herling in the Evening Star of March 6 entitled "Perón's Five-Year Plan" is somewhat more factual but when he speaks of the project being one for a combined military and social state, he is projecting his own ideas into the plans of the Argentine Government. That it is projecting social reforms which are sadly needed for the most part in the Argentine, he is entirely right. When he says that the Argentine is planning to set up a military state, he is completely wrong.

So much for Herling, and I am afraid he does not deserve that much attention. The difficulty is that so many men feel that they have to write so many lines and write with a complete lack of sense of responsibility in the difficult times in which we live. I suppose Herling on the whole is a well-meaning man who is making a living.

So far as the visit of this labor delegation is concerned to the Argentine, it has turned out to be a great tragedy and I knew from the outset that it would have most likely unhappy consequences. It is not clear as to how the invitation was first issued, but there is reason to believe that it was the thought of Dr. Ivanessovich, the Argentine Ambassador in Washington, who is a very well-meaning man and a great surgeon but who has very little experience in matters of this kind and who has a great faith in human nature. The invitation, as you know, was originally extended through the Argentine Embassy to the A.F. of L. and the C.I.O. The C.I.O. turned it down and

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after a good deal of consideration, the A.F. of L. accepted.

I was not here when these men arrived, but I returned before the delegation left. Immediately on my return to Buenos Aires, on February 1, I heard of some of the unfortunate things which happened and which were almost certain to happen. It seems that the Argentine Government through the Ministry of Interior and of Labor had appointed a group of people to take care of the American labor delegation and the mistake was made of not selecting the very best people but some people were in the receiving party who have very little connection with labor. From the very beginning, the American labor delegation got the impression that they were being kept away from some of the labor unions. It seems that beginning with their arrival, some of the American delegates and principally Romualdi felt that they were personally slighted and that was a bad start.

Then they got word that President Perón would receive them at 8 o'clock in the morning. This is nothing unusual here for the President gets to his office every day at 6:30 a.m. and his fixing the time at 8 o'clock in the morning was purely a routine matter. The American labor delegates sent back word that it was too early in the morning and could they not come later. As Perón is really sincerely interested in labor and has been for years, even when he was purely a military man, he thought this a very strange attitude for labor delegates and I suppose he formed a rather poor opinion of the delegates before he ever saw them.

In any event, he saw them the next day at a later hour and it appears that Ramualdi, who is a Latin although an American citizen, and who is probably a very fine person but very self-centered, and very voluble, said in his remarks that he and his associates had come to "investigate". This word did not strike the President well as one can readily understand, and I am told that he took objection to it and Ramualdi said that he had not used the word, but I think there is very little doubt but that he did use it. In any event, none of the circumstances were propitious for that first meeting for the American delegates

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went away feeling that they had not been too well treated on their arrival , and Perón felt that they were poor labor delegates if they could not meet the President of a friendly country at 8 o'clock in the morning. The long and short of it is that they did get off to a bad start, but the President received them again, I believe, a day or two later, and everything seemed more smooth.

The delegates came to see me before they left and told me their story. Ramualdi tried to do all the talking, and I found him very tiresome because he seemed to be more interested in himself than in anything else. I noticed that the other delegates got as impatient over the long speech which he was making to me as I did. After he got through with his speech to me others of the delegates spoke, and I thought they were a very intelligent and well-meaning group. I confined myself to saying that I thought it was too bad that they had made the trip at all because in my opinion it would have been better for the invitation not to have been issued and better for them not to have accepted. I said that I did not wish to go into an analysis of the labor situation in the Argentine as I could not possibly do that, but that when they told me that they would have to report to the A.F. of L. at home that they had not found a free labor movement in the Argentine, I said that they could have known that and must have known that before they came. I said that labor movements in the other American republics were developing and in some respects were in their infancy and that they could not expect certain things from labor unions and in labor unions which we had at home. I said to them that in many ways in some of these countries the members of the unions played much more of a part in the determination of union attitudes than was the case in some unions at home. I said that it was very difficult to form judgments and that it was particularly unhappy that they would go home and say that there was no free labor movement in the Argentine leaving the impression that there was a free labor movement in the other American republics. I said that if they had gone to the other 19 republics they would have found situations somewhat similar to the ones which they found here. They hadn't been in these other countries and they had been in the Argentine and were going home to make this report and it would leave this impression among our people that a situation existed in the Argentine which was unique in

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the American countries. I said that all this could do no good and that some very major things were at stake.

I was very careful in what I said to these men, but I found them, as I say, with the exception of Ramualdi a very intelligent and very well-meaning group. They said to me and to other Americans here that it was not their intention to make a public report when they got home. They said it was their intention on the other hand to make a report to the A.F. of L. Central Committee and leave it up to the Central Committee whether a report would be published.

A few days before the report was published at home and sent out by the AP and UP, the press agencies carried a report that the American labor delegates were going to see Assistant Secretary Braden before they made their report. This dispatch made a very unhappy impression here among the Argentines in and out of the government, and I knew it was going to make a lot of trouble for when the report was published whether Braden had anything to do with it or not, some of the newspapers here would begin to rant and of course they did.

The report has had wide publicity here in the press. The CGT here has issued a statement which has received equally wide publicity, and of course it blames the whole report on Ramualdi and Braden. This brings the name of Braden into the picture again which is most unfortunate and can do no good in either country nor to the problem which we must resolve. It makes the solution more difficult at home and here.

So far as the report of the labor delegates is concerned, it would be improper for me to go into it in this letter. All I can say is that there are things in the report which are not factually correct, and the reply of the CGT here is not a very good reply because it is written in passion.

It is too bad that the visit ever took place because it does not do for private organizations to go into another country and to make reports on conditions in that country especially when they effect political problems. This is not a good thing in normal times, but when the relations

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between two countries that should be friendly are in the position that ours are with the Argentine, it was all the more obvious that nothing should be done which could possibly disturb that relationship.

I wish I could go further into this labor matter, but as I am accused by some of writing letters with regard to the Argentine situation to everybody over the lot, I am being prudent in this letter to you and only giving you certain factual data without going into any of the issues in question. Naturally, so far as the Department is concerned, we are reporting very fully to it on all phases of this matter.

You state in your letter of March 6 that certain quotes from President Perón in one of Herling's articles seemed to be "fairly deadly". You will appreciate that these quotes are from speeches made by Perón before he became President and while there was a military de facto government. I think you will find that the public speeches of Perón since he became President have been more and more restrained and constructive. It is, of course, easy to pick out things from the past and project them into the present when one has a particular axe to grind or when one has a particular point of view which one wishes to establish.

It is particularly unhappy that this question should arise with respect to this labor delegation for things are developing on the whole satisfactorily in the relationships between the two countries, but everytime things seem to be going well, an incident such as this arises which throws everything out of joint and out of perspective. The report of the labor delegates is going to create a lot of bad feeling here both in and out of the government and it is going to cause a lot of misapprehensions and misunderstandings concerning the situation here at home. The reply of the labor organization here, the CGT, is not going to help the situation either here or at home but will merely acervate old feelings and old situations.

I am not permitting myself to be discouraged by all of this. I am confident that in due course the Argentine will have fully complied with all of her

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commitments and that we will recognize this situation and bring our relationships to that normal and completely collaborative basis on which they should be. Incidents such as that concerning this labor delegation and others which I could mention which have recently occurred make the situation here more difficult and create a feeling of impatience and there is grave danger that if the situation is not composed in due course and before too long that a situation will be created here which will make any composition impossible and that will be bad for the Argentine and bad for us and bad for this hemisphere.

I have the confidence that there are enough people at home with a real knowledge of the facts and with a constructive point of view to assure that the situation will be cleared up. We can do far more by a friendly attitude towards the Argentine to see that things take a constructive course here than we can by the attitude which a part of our press and writers, et cetera, are taking.

This is a very long letter, but I know of your deep interest in this problem. I have not gone into the substance of some of the things because I do not want to put myself in the position even in a personal letter to you to go into questions on which there is a difference of opinion or interpretation of facts.

Mrs. Messersmith joins in all good wishes to you and we both will not forget the very many kindnesses which you and your good wife showed me while I was home. Please remember me to the children.

With all good wishes,

Cordially and faithfully yours,

George S. Messersmith