

Subject: Luncheon in Cuernavaca with General Cardenas.

I do not know how long it was after my arrival in Mexico as chief of the diplomatic mission that Dr. Frank Tannenbaum, a professor at Columbia University, came to Mexico and called to see me. I had seen Dr. Tannenbaum from time to time, I believe, at meetings of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York City. I realized that it was the desire of General Avila Camacho, President of Mexico, for me to see as much as possible of General Cárdenas. I think that the President really thought that by friendly contact between Cárdenas and myself it might be possible to get General Cárdenas to understand our country better and to assume a less unfriendly and intransigent attitude with respect to everything that affected Mexican-United States relations in a friendly sense. The General was not very anxious, I think, to have such contact. When Tannenbaum called to see me in Mexico City, he told me that he had come at the invitation of General Cárdenas. He said that for some years General Cárdenas was inviting him to Mexico every year, and he told me very frankly that General Cárdenas paid the expenses of his trip. His visits to General Cárdenas were entirely friendly and had nothing to do with the Department of State or our relations with Mexico.

I had known of this friendship between General Cárdenas and Tannenbaum. As a matter of fact, I know of no <sup>other</sup> American who was really considered ~~to be a friend of~~ <sup>as a friend,</sup> Cárdenas. He seemed to shun Americans and, in fact, he seemed to shun most foreigners. A sister of General Cárdenas was married to an American and they lived in the State of Michoacán, the native state of the General. I always understood that the General had very little regard for this American husband of his sister.

Tannenbaum told me that he thought it would be very desirable if I had lunch with Cárdenas one day in Cuernavaca. He was spending a

good deal of his time there at that time. He felt pretty sure that General Cárdenas would be glad to see me but he did not wish to propose anything to the General until he had talked with me. I told Tannenbaum that my work kept me very busy but that whenever I could I spent a week-end with Floyd Ransom at his home in Cuernavaca. I said that I did as little as I could during these short week-ends I was able to spend there as my work pretty well tired me out, but that I would be very glad to lunch with Cárdenas in Cuernavaca any Saturday or Sunday he would designate. Tannenbaum said he thought it would be very useful for us to know each other better.

A few days later I had a message from Tannenbaum that General Cárdenas would be expecting me for lunch on the following Saturday or Sunday and that he would communicate with me a little later. My wife and I went to Cuernavaca to the home of Ransom that Friday evening and the following Saturday morning early, in fact very early, I got a telephone message that General Cárdenas was expecting me for lunch and would I come at ten o'clock. I went to the home of General Cárdenas in Cuernavaca; it was a very modest home with a little bit of ground around it. He seemed to be alone for I saw no one except a few servants about. He received me very courteously and we spent the morning sitting on the veranda talking about all sorts of things. We talked about agriculture, labor, and in fact about most everything except oil. The General seemed to be very much interested in knowing my reaction with regard to the situation in Mexico and he was particularly interested in having information with regard to certain aspects of our agricultural situation in the United States. About one-thirty we had luncheon and there was one person present, it was an officer of subordinate rank, who, I think, was attached to the General as an aide. It is customary for the Mexican government to assign one or more officers to a retired President. The

conversation at luncheon was commonplace. After luncheon we retired to a small library or sitting-room off the dining-room and General Cárdenas suggested that I might wish to take a brief siesta and he would do the same. There was a couch in the room and I stretched out for a few minutes but had no desire to sleep and I amused myself for a few moments looking at the books in the General's shelves. There were mostly books on agriculture, on labor problems, social problems, most all of them in Spanish. They were the kind of books that I would expect to see in a library of Cárdenas. They were all according to my notion ~~written~~ by the wrong people and it was quite clear that the General was not interested in reading books which expounded ideas contrary to the ones he held. As a matter of fact, this small collection of books in the room was very revealing as to the character of the General. After about three-quarters of an hour Cárdenas returned to the room and we had a little more conversation and I thanked him for having asked me to lunch and returned to the Ransom house.

I did not have very much expectation of much good from the luncheon. I'm sure that Tannenbaum arranged it in good faith. Some people always viewed the friendship between Cárdenas and Tannenbaum with suspicion and seemed to think less of Tannenbaum. I do not know too much of Tannenbaum's ideas and I do not know him very well, but I think that he is a good American and, while I doubt that we would have very much in common on certain social matters and problems, I never considered him as being one on the extreme left. That he was a man of too liberal advanced ideas for me was always my attitude. I never doubted, however, his good intentions. I think Tannenbaum was disappointed<sup>with</sup>/~~at~~ the result of the conversation; he came to see me a few days later at the Embassy in Mexico City and said he was about to return to the United States. He said he had had a very pleasant visit with General Cárdenas

and that the General had been very much pleased with the conversation with me. He had found it most interesting to talk with me and had expressed satisfaction that he had learned to know me better. I gathered from what Tannenbaum said that Cárdenas had arrived at the conclusion that I wasn't quite as bad as he thought I was. I told Tannenbaum that while I appreciated what he had done in arranging for this luncheon, that I myself had little illusions that it had accomplished any good purpose and that it was too much to expect that much good would come out of such contact. I said to Tannenbaum that I thought that General Cárdenas was so set in his ideas that really friendship with Americans like me and others would not help very much in broadening these ideas. Tannenbaum made no specific comment but I had the impression that he was completely agreeing with me in this respect.

On another occasion, President Avila Camacho and the Mexican government had invited General George Marshall, then Chief of Staff of the Army, and a number of high ranking generals to come to Mexico City for the celebration of the September 16 Anniversary. It became customary during the war for the Mexican government to ask <sup>high-ranking</sup> ~~these~~ generals to come to ~~these~~ celebration. It was a very useful and helpful innovation. General Avila Camacho suggested that it would be interesting, as a part of the program, for me to give a dinner at the Embassy residence. He said he would be very glad to come to this dinner and that he would be very glad to invite General Cárdenas to the dinner, or rather that I should invite General Cárdenas if I saw no objection. I realized it was another of the many ways in which General Avila Camacho was trying to bring Cárdenas into closer and more friendly contact with Americans. I said to the President that I doubted very much whether General Cárdenas would accept the invitation but that I would be very glad to

extend it, and that I would do so. General Avila Camacho said, "You may be sure that he will accept and you may be sure that he will be on time for I will bring him".

The dinner was one for men alone. General Avila Camacho arrived exactly at eight, the time set for the dinner and had General Cárdenas with him. After dinner the President and General Cárdenas and General Marshall and several Mexican officers and the officers who had accompanied General Marshall sat around in a circle in the big living-room of the Embassy residence. The talk was entirely on the war and on military subjects. General Cárdenas never showed himself more amiable when I saw him than he did that evening. He did not join <sup>in</sup> much/the conversation. I don't think that General Cárdenas ever got very much interested in the war. While I do not think he had much sympathy, if any, with the Nazi regime, he certainly did not have any sympathy for us. I always felt that he would be glad to see us get a kick in the back. I conserve a picture which was taken at the time of this dinner, which was taken of Avila Camacho, Cárdenas, Marshall and myself. It is the only picture which I have in which Cárdenas appears and in which he has a smile.