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COURIER

Sumner

CONFIDENTIAL

Mexico, August 5, 1942

Dear Sumner:

I have had some correspondence recently with regard to Sinarquismo with Larry Duggan, and as you asked me for my opinion some time ago, which I gave you, I have suggested to Larry that he give you a copy of my recent letter to him, which you may be able to read.

You will recall that in my letter to you of May 21st I gave you a resumé of my conversations with the President and the Archbishop on Sinarquismo. The other day, while the President and I were chatting in his home and discussing the reactions of the Mexican people to the war, the President referred to the conversation which I had had with him on Sinarquismo and to the conversation I had had with the Archbishop. During that conversation I had told the President that it was difficult to understand the lukewarm attitude of the Church, and particularly of Sinarquistas, to developments in the rest of the world which so definitely threaten Mexico and all of us.

You will be interested to know that the other day the President recalled the conversation which I had had with him and said that immediately thereafter he had asked the Archbishop to come in to see him. He did not say to me in what manner and form he had discussed Sinarquismo with the Archbishop, but the President did say to me that he had discussed at length with the Archbishop the attitude of the Catholic Church towards the war. He had told the Archbishop that he found too great apathy on the part of the clergy and of the Church towards the war, which in his opinion had such definite implications for Mexico. I gathered that the President had made it very clear to the Archbishop that he felt the Church was not helping itself by this lack of a clearly defined attitude on the war.

I mention the foregoing as it is evidence of the sincerity of the President and of his deep convictions as well as of his energy -- for it was apparent that he had not failed to speak quite clearly to the Archbishop.

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The Honorable Sumner Welles,
Undersecretary of State, Washington.

So far as the Archbishop and the Church are concerned, I do not believe that the President feels that their response is as yet adequate. I have it, however, from good sources that the Archbishop intends to make more energetic declarations with respect to the attitude of the Church and of the clergy regarding the war.

We are very fortunate in having a man such as President Avila Camacho as head of the Mexican State these days, for I am convinced that he is a sincere friend and a man of very deep and resolute convictions. Besides that, he is really quite a wise man when one considers that he has not traveled and that his background is so largely military. I think the following incident will give you an interesting sidelight on his character and manner of procedure:

On another occasion within the last few weeks, when I saw him in his home and we were talking about the railroad situation, with particular reference to the need for better administration in the railways (a question to which the President is giving much thought and increasing action), I took occasion to inquire into the health of General Estrada, who is the head of the National Railways of Mexico. I went so far as to say that I thought it was regrettable that the state of health of the General prevented his giving the administration of the railways his attention at a time when his strong hand was needed. The President saw what I was endeavoring to imply and remarked as follows:

It was too bad that General Estrada was suffering from poor health. The last news he had from his doctor in Rochester was not encouraging. On the other hand, it was possible that the General would regain his health. He felt it was quite impossible in the circumstances to replace the General with someone else, although his not doing so placed greater responsibilities upon himself. He said perhaps it would be interesting to know an episode from his own life. Some years back the Army had rebelled against the Government. He was in command of eight hundred twenty-five men and defending a village, - I forget the name of it. He was loyal to the President and to the Government. The rebelling General was attacking him with almost nine thousand men. He held out for some days, when he had to surrender. When he put up the white flag, General Estrada, who was the rebelling General, treated him with the utmost consideration. General Estrada's associates wanted the General to shoot General Avila Camacho summarily. The President remarked that that of course would not have been anything unusual and he quite expected it. However, General Estrada accepted

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his surrender, permitted his remaining troops to disband, and asked him (General Avila Camacho) what he wished to do. The President said he told General Estrada he wished to go back to Mexico City and report to his Chief, the President of Mexico. General Estrada permitted him to do this. The President said that in these circumstances I would appreciate that he had a debt to General Estrada which he could never repay. He then went on to say, "If the President of a country cannot be kind and understanding, who can be expected to be kind and understanding?"

I thought it was an extraordinary reflection of the man, confirmed by other evidences of the same character which I have had the opportunity of seeing.

The President was trying to tell me that although he realized it would be well to replace General Estrada, he felt he could not do so, even if this placed for the time being greater responsibilities on him and made the task of the improvement of the management of the railways in some ways more difficult.

It occurs to me that at an appropriate opportunity you may wish to tell President Roosevelt of the little incident in President Avila Camacho's past, as I am sure the President will appreciate it very fully.

With all good wishes,

Cordially and sincerely yours,

G S MESSERSMITH

GSM:KCT