

1703

Mexico, D. F., March 23, 1945.

Secret - Restricted

Dear Nelson:

A report has come to me from very reliable sources that "the Mexican Government has received an inquiry from a representative of the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City as to whether Maxim Litvinoff would be acceptable as the next Ambassador of Soviet Russia to Mexico". This information came to me in a way and from a source which has proved so reliable in the past that I could not disregard it, although I felt sure that no approaches had been made to the Ministry of Foreign Relations in this connection. I, however, took the opportunity during a call on Dr. Padilla today, to ask him in a purely informal and unofficial way whether I could commit the indiscretion to ask him an improper question. The Minister said that I could be indiscreet, and I asked him whether any approaches had been made to the Mexican Government or to the Ministry as to whether Litvinoff would be acceptable as Soviet Ambassador here. Dr. Padilla replied that this was news to him, and the first that he had heard of it, and that so far as he was concerned, no approaches had been made to the Ministry of Foreign Relations with regard to Litvinoff as a successor to Oumansky. As a matter of fact, the Minister said that so far as he was concerned, no approaches had been made to explore the acceptability of any particular person as a successor to Oumansky.

I found this particularly interesting, as the information which I had received had come from a particularly well-informed source, and I am inclined to think, since no such approaches have been made, informally or officially to the Foreign Office here, that

this

The Honorable  
Nelson A. Rockefeller,  
Assistant Secretary of State,  
Washington, D. C.

this talk has been put out by the Soviet Embassy here in certain circles closely addicted to it.

What is very important in this connection, and which I wanted you to know, is the following. Padilla left me the impression that things were a little strained between the Mexican Government and the Soviet Government. He said that they had received a request from the Soviet Government for a further report on the circumstances surrounding the death of Oumansky and his wife and other members of the staff of the Soviet Embassy. Padilla said that, for my strictly confidential information, the Soviet Government had asked for a report and that the Mexican Government had made a very full investigation and had made a very full report by the competent technicians, which report had been furnished to the Soviet Embassy here for the Soviet Government. The report clearly established that it was an accident, and that sabotage in no manner came into question. Padilla said that now the Mexican Government had received a request from the Soviet Government for a further investigation and for further information. I do not recall whether he said that the request of the Soviet Government for further information specifically stated that it did not place sabotage out of the question, but in any event, I can say from what Padilla did tell me that the request of the Soviet Government for further information clearly implied that that Government still considered the probability of sabotage.

Padilla did not say very much, but he said that in view of the further request which the Soviet Government had made for information, he did not think that the Soviet Government or the Mexican Government would be considering in the immediate future the question of a successor to Oumansky. In other words, it was very clear from what Padilla said that the attitude of the Soviet Government in this matter, which is so utterly unreasonable and which cannot be anything but insincere, has caused a very bad impression in the Mexican Government and, so far as the latter is concerned, it seems to be indifferent to any question of a new Soviet Ambassador being named here.

It will be recalled from the records of the Department and from previous correspondence, that when relations between the Soviet Government and Mexico were broken

off

off some years ago, it was at the initiative of the Mexican Government, which had become extremely upset by the procedures of the Soviet representative here, and by the manner in which the Mexican diplomatic representative in Moscow was being treated. I recall that a Mexican who was a high official in the Mexican Embassy in Moscow at the time relations were broken off, told me about a year ago that the manner in which the Mexican Chief of Mission in Moscow was treated was intolerable, as he was frequently called to the Soviet Foreign Office, where he was talked to and given orders as though Mexico were a Communist State under the control of Soviet Russia. I know also, from those having first-hand knowledge here, that the then Soviet Chief of Mission here had a very arrogant attitude and assumed direct intervention in affairs which Mexico considered purely internal. In other words, relations were broken off between Soviet Russia and Mexico some years ago because even though the Government of Mexico was a Left Government, it did not consider itself a Communist Government and resented the attitudes of Moscow with respect to Mexico.

In my reports to the Department during the last year, I have brought out that Oumansky was rapidly bringing this situation in Mexico to practically the same point as it had been brought some years ago. Oumansky, through over-zealousness or under directives, was much too active here and his over-activity caused great concern within and without the Government. His coming was hailed with enthusiasm by certain extreme Left elements here who soon lost interest, however, because of his ostentation and his over-activity, and because of the display of the Soviet Embassy in acquiring what was, in many respects, the most luxurious private residence in Mexico as their Embassy. By his over-activity and by his super-sensitiveness and by his lack of tact, and by his failure to really understand certain fundamental conditions in Mexico, Oumansky was getting to the position, shortly before his death, where he would soon have become non grata here. As a matter of fact, some two months before his death, there was some question of his being taken away because he had made himself so obnoxious to certain high officials of the Mexican Government through tactless procedure and over-zealousness, and undoubted too great interest in internal Mexican affairs.

From

From the very beginning there was naturally some speculation as to sabotage in connection with the death of Oumansky. Such speculation was unavoidable, but there was never any basis for it. I am sure that no one knows better that there was no question of sabotage than the officials of the Soviet Embassy themselves. I am inclined to the opinion that it is the TASS correspondent in Mexico City, Dashkevich, who is probably very largely responsible for having raised this question from here. Judging from the press messages which he has sent to Moscow, many of which have not been permitted to go forward by the Mexican censorship, but most of which have been permitted to go forward, he is capable of any perversion. I am not able to say whether these suspicions of the Soviet Government in Moscow with regard to sabotage in connection with the death of Oumansky are based on reports which have come from here, from the Soviet Embassy and Dashkevich, or whether this attitude is merely characteristic of the Soviet officials in Moscow, who have been known to use such means of pressure on other countries. It would be nothing new. Why they should wish to use this as a form of pressure on Mexico, I am not able to surmise, except that there is no doubt that the Soviet Embassy and Soviet Government do not like, particularly, the President of Mexico, the Foreign Minister, and most of the high officials of the Mexican Government, because they are moderate. There is no doubt that Toledano has a definite alliance with the Soviet Embassy here, and is persona gratissima in Moscow. It may be that the Soviet Government is trying to use this charge of alleged sabotage as a means of bringing pressure on the Mexican Government and strengthening the position, as it believes, of certain Left elements here.

All I can say is that if that is their objective, they are following just as mistaken a course as they did some years ago when that course led to a rupture of relations. While General Cárdenas had, without any question, quite close contact with Ambassador Oumansky, he had, I think, no illusions whatever with regard to Oumansky, and anyone who knows General Cárdenas knows that he would be against any intervention in internal affairs in Mexico--no matter where it comes from.

I have wanted you to have this picture in full and to date, because it is an interesting development that the Soviet Government should officially have asked the Mexican

Government

Government for further information with regard to the accident through which Oumansky lost his life, when the Mexican Government had made such a full, objective and, I am sure, entirely well-founded report. This action of the Soviet Government was bound to have the repercussions which I gather it has already had within the Mexican Government.

I cannot close this letter without, in a lighter vein, telling you something which gave me my first smile out of this whole affair. An official in the Mexican Government, not in the Foreign Office, commenting on these alleged maneuvers of the Soviet Embassy with respect to inquiries concerning the acceptability of Litvinoff, said "why should the Russians want to send such a high caliber man to Mexico when they already have such a good Ambassador here". When the friend to whom this official made this remark asked to whom he referred, the official replied "Why, Toledano, of course".

With all good wishes,

Cordially and sincerely yours,

GSM/eer

G.S. Messersmith