

Habana, April 17, 1940.

Memorandum of Conversation
with Dr. Cosme de la Torriente

Dr. de la Torriente came to see me yesterday afternoon without appointment and although I had engagements I had them cancelled so as to have an opportunity for a long talk with him. He talked at considerable length concerning developments in Cuba during the past years and his connection with events. I could see that he was going into this long resumé so that it would serve as background for what he wished to say.

He went on to say that he was much more disturbed over the communist influence in Cuba than others seemed to be here. Batista had played with the Communists for his own advantage and he did not see him getting rid of them as easily as he seemed to think he could. These people had good leaders and they were able to make a lot of progress with the young people in Cuba. Most dangerous of all, they were raising this question of whites and blacks which in Cuba he says is one of the most explosive questions to be raised.

He went on to say that he was not happy about the way the situation was developing here. He had noticed in the newspapers recently a tendency to criticize the Constitutional Assembly. As the newspapers were so definitely under the control of the Government because of the subsidies it gave them, he read sinister implications into this. He thought there was really in progress a campaign to discredit the Assembly before the Cuban people and that this could well indicate an intention on the part of Batista and others to see that there should be no constitution and to prepare the way for further provisional government.

In this connection I remarked that while I had seen a good deal of comment in the press with regard

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to the Assembly and its work in connection with the constitution that much of it seemed to be of a constructive character and that the Assembly was being criticized more for its slowness and for the radical nature of the articles so far produced. It seemed to me, I said, that this was more a healthful than an unhealthful indication.

Dr. de la Torriente then went on to say that his long experience in Cuban politics and his close observation of and association with events in the past gave him the feeling that there were some unhappy symptoms to be noted. He had this impression that the ground was being prepared for a provisional government. He did not go into any detail in this respect and I could not get any real basis from him for this feeling which he said he had.

He did not seem to be impressed with the idea that it would be desirable to give legislative powers to the remainder of the Congress. He seemed to have doubts as to whether the Constitutional Assembly had any power to give legislative authority to the remainder of the Congress. He expressed fears that if such legislative powers were given to the remainder of the Congress that it would legislate on all kinds of subjects and in an undesirable way. The rump Congress, he said, might pass the authorizing act for the payment of the Public Works debts (Warren Brothers and Purdy & Henderson) but it seemed equally sure that it would also pass legislation continuing the moratorium with all the unhappy effects it would have for Cuba.

He said that he was in touch with Grau and that he found Grau more conservative than most of those in the Menocal group - surprising as this might be. When I indicated that Grau was having apparently a good deal of difficulty in keeping his people in line and that, in spite of the conservative attitude which Dr. de la Torriente said Grau was taking, his radical followers evidently had the bit in the teeth and were the ones who were producing these articles for the constitution which would work out so dangerously for the future of Cuba. Dr. de la Torriente agreed that Grau was having this difficulty with his people.

I discussed at some length with Dr. de la Torriente the necessity for this constitution about to be produced to be one which would give an adequate basis for confidence and for the future. Of course no arguments in this direction are necessary with him. He emphasized at various times through his conversation that he was not actively participating in any way in politics. He did say that Grau had agreed to send him all the work of the Constitutional Assembly so far so that he could make his comment and that this he would do. I told him how much he was doing in the interest of Cuba in doing this work.

The Ambassador

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