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Habana, April 10, 1940.

Personal and  
Confidential

Dear Larry:

As I told you, I am going to try to get as much in despatches as I possibly can from here. It is quite impossible, however, to put certain background in despatches so I have written quite a number of letters to Mr. Welles which I have always transmitted in duplicate, with the hope that copies would reach you without delay. I hope these have been reaching you because they give a very full picture of the developments. If they are not reaching you promptly please let me know and I will have to put more in our despatches.

The luncheon which Fraga gave for me on Monday at the Nacional was a very large one - something over 150. Fraga had told me that he would invite Batista, Menocal and Grau and make the gathering thoroughly representative. Batista and Menocal were there but it turned out to be largely a Batista-Menocal party as Grau, who had been invited and who had accepted, later said that he could not come as he would have to be at a meeting of the Constitutional Assembly. This, of course, was only an excuse and not only he but those more intimately associated with him remained away. I think it is understood, however, in informed quarters that he had been asked.

I think you know that Fraga wanted to give such a luncheon immediately after I came here and I told him that I appreciated his thought but that I considered it not wise at that time in view of the

political

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political conversations going on between Batista, Menocal and Grau. When about a month later he renewed his desire I felt that I could not refuse as the circumstances had changed and he gave me the assurance that he would ask the leaders and principal people in the three groups. The luncheon passed off very well and there were no speeches!

After the luncheon I had a several hour talk with Batista. We covered the whole ground. I gave him all the background which I had given to the President, to Dr. Campa, to Fraga and to Ramos as I wanted to be sure that he had it. I am glad I did so for I am not sure that he had received the picture as fully as I gave it to him.

With respect to the remainder of the Congress, he said that he and Menocal and Grau had agreed that the Constituent Assembly should authorize the remainder of the Congress to act but that, while it would apparently have full powers, it would be definitely understood that it would not act except on matters submitted to it by the President. He indicated that the Constituent Assembly would give this power to legislate to the remainder of the Congress before the end of this week. I have given a lot of background with regard to this in my letters to Mr. Welles so will not go into more detail here.

With respect to the Public Works debts Batista said that he had passed his word on this and indicated that this matter would be attended to immediately after the Constituent Assembly had given the power to legislate to the remainder of the Congress. I had seen Casanova a few days before and Casanova assured me that this matter would be settled soon.

With respect to the constitution Batista said that a committee of four was working very hard on this matter and that they hoped to have a draft ready by Wednesday or Thursday of this week. He spoke of the impossible character of the drafts of certain sections which had so far been submitted and he said that he thoroughly understood the necessity for the new constitution being a document which would tend towards stability and confidence rather than the contrary.

Throughout

Throughout the conversation I tried to make it clear to Batista how important it was that this question of the Public Works debts should be settled without further delay and I did not spare any words. I made the matter just as clear to him as possible and told him that there was almost nothing which could be done that would be more disastrous for their interests than to produce a radical constitution or one that did not give full confidence. I am working very hard on this and am doing what I can in the most concrete way every day. As a matter of fact I plan to see the President tomorrow at the latest.

There is so much that I would like to write you that I cannot even begin to comment. I am fearful that the hearings on the sugar bills which I understand may start today in the House of Representatives may bring out some things which will not make the solution of our problems with Cuba and the internal problem here any easier. We shall have to hope for the best and certainly I have during the past month made it clear how important it is that they should do some concrete things here in order to create a more favorable atmosphere at home.

With all good wishes to you and your wife, believe me,

Cordially yours,

GEORGE S. MESSERSMITH