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AIRMAIL

Habana, Cuba,  
April 20, 1940.

Personal and  
Confidential

Dear Summer:

I am sending you herewith a copy of my strictly confidential despatch No. 185 of April 19th, with which I sent to the Department a translation of a memorandum which Martínez Fraga left with me a few days ago. You will wish to read this memorandum as well as my despatch.

I think I should tell you that even more than the memorandum itself, the way in which Fraga took it up with me has left a bad taste in my mouth. I thought it well not to so indicate in the despatch, but you will wish to know the way Fraga took up the memorandum with me clearly indicated that he was hoping for a favorable reaction and comment from me thereon which he could carry back. It was only when I pointed out to him how obvious it was that we could not take any cognizance of such a memorandum officially that he began to take a very apologetic attitude with reference to it and said that he had been obliged to take it up with me because López Castro felt it could not be altogether disregarded. López Castro, I am confident, would be the first to realize that neither our Government nor the Cuban Government could be a party to any such a transaction between the growers here and the refiners in the United States, even though such a transaction were a possible one. I think López Castro probably told Fraga that the existence of the memorandum should be brought to your and my attention for our information, but I cannot believe that López Castro would lend it even the most indirect support.

While I refused to discuss the contents of the memorandum, I made it clear to Fraga that I thought the knowledge in the United States, or in Cuba, of the existence of this memorandum would cause Cuban interests considerable damage. You will be amused that Fraga was very much impressed by a claim of the refiners, as expressed in the memorandum, that they could control 260 votes in the House. I told him that he must have been in the United States long enough to know what the attitude of our people and the administration were on certain lobbies.

The

The Honorable  
Summer Welles,  
Under Secretary of State,  
Department of State,  
Washington, D.C.

The knowledge of the existence of such a transactional memorandum would scatter those 260 votes before the four winds, I said. In spite of this, he kept referring in his conversation to the "great strength" of the sugar lobby.

I told Fraga, of course, I would see that this memorandum came to your attention, but that he would be wise in telling his friends here who had approached him on this matter that they seemed to have a wrong conception of the way we did things at home; these men who had initiated and carried on these conversations with the refiners in the United States were running a grave risk of prejudicing their own interests because such acts could only tend in the end to make more lukewarm some of those who are defending Cuban interests parallel with our own. I said to him that our attitude, and the President's, as indicated in his letter to Chairman Marvin Jones, was based on considerations of general policy and not on such transactional factors as his friends had in mind.

The other man who participated in this conversation, besides Santiesteban, was Carlos Martínez. It is a question as to how much these two men even represent the Colonos.

If you have any comment which you may wish me to convey to Fraga, I will be very glad to have it. I think you may be as much surprised as I was that he should even come to me with such a memorandum. There seems to be no doubt that Fraga maintains his contact with Batista and Menocal, and is struggling to maintain his position, but I have the impression that he is distinctly slipping and that he feels it. I always have the unhappy feeling when he is talking with me that he is only telling me half the story which he ought without reserve to give me.

As to Fraga's plans, they seem to be very uncertain. I am giving a dinner for the Secretary of State and Mrs. Campa on the evening of May 7th, and am inviting Fraga. He has told you, as you will recall, that he would be in Washington on the 15th of this month. He now says that he may not be able to come to dinner as he would like to be in Washington early in May, and to be there for the Scientific Congress, but that circumstances here in the political situation may make it impossible for him to leave. I made no comment except to express the hope that if he were here on the 7th we would have the pleasure of seeing him at dinner.

With every good wish,

Cordially and faithfully yours,

GEORGE S. MESSERSMITH

Enclosure.

GSM:fm.