

1437

AIR MAIL

Personal and
Strictly Con-
fidential.

Habana, Cuba,
Feb. 10, 1941.

Dear Philip:

I have before me your airmail letter of February 6th which, for some reason, did not reach me until this morning, and am very glad to know that Mr. Welles and you found my despatch, No. 1505 of February 3rd, helpful. I have given careful consideration to your suggestion, which I appreciate, that before sending my 1505 to be indexed and incorporated in the Department's files, and before giving the despatch further circulation, I might wish to substitute therefor a despatch giving a complete picture of the circumstances.

As it now stands, the official record of this bloodless revolution, for a revolution it was even though it was carried through without the shedding of a single drop of blood and completely behind the scenes, consists of my despatch No. 1500 of February 1, my strictly confidential despatch No. 1505 of February 3, my despatch No. 1513 of February 4, my confidential telegram No. 24 of February 4 11 a.m., my despatch No. 1527 of February 5, and my despatch No. 1539 of February 7. There are other despatches of secondary importance transmitting press comment, etc., in connection with the revolution. The record, I think, which I have made in these despatches is complete and, I believe, accurate. As a matter of fact, I think we were unusually well and correctly informed of the real facts and developments and to a degree more so than is usually possible when a drama is played so completely behind the scenes as this one was. I should say here that I am indebted to a considerable degree to my Military and Naval Attachés who, during these events, were particularly helpful in carrying out the instructions which I gave them and who, on their initiative and particularly because of the close contacts which they have in certain quarters, were able to be very helpful. They did not have the whole picture as fully as I did, for I had sources of information which they did not have, but they were most useful in filling in certain gaps. Further than this, I should say that they showed considerable discretion and judgment. It was they who on the night of

February 4th

Philip Bonsal, Esquire,
Division of American Republics,
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February 4th brought me the message from Colonel Batista at his direct request that "everything was all right".

I know that in the record as it stands and as I have written it to the Department, there seemed to be some inconsistencies, but these are a part of the drama, and the picture is not complete without them, because in spite of inconsistencies the situation was as I presented it. For example, it would appear from my 1505, and later developments, that the position of Colonel Benitez had been misrepresented. As a matter of fact, it was just that. He was first with Colonel Pedraza and had assured him of his loyalty, and President Batista felt sure that Benitez had gone over. How President Batista was able to win Benitez over on February 3rd, perhaps no one but the two will ever know, but he became the keyman in the sudden shift-over of the armed forces from Pedraza to Batista.

I have said, in my 1505, that President Batista sat for several days in the Palace practically helpless, as Pedraza felt sure the armed forces were with him, and the President had every reason to believe that they were with Pedraza. This is a correct picture of the situation and it makes the developments which followed only more dramatic and only emphasizes the resourcefulness and the decision with which the President acted. The story, as I have told it, gives, I believe, due credit to Batista and Pedraza, for although Pedraza acted unwisely his behavior, in the end, had much to commend it for, because it would have been easily possible for the situation to resolve itself into one of civil war, the consequence of which would have been bloodshed in Habana and in the Provinces.

When you wrote me on February 6th, I doubt whether you had seen my despatch No. 1522 of February 5th.

Under the circumstances, I do not believe it would be advisable to withdraw my 1505, and to substitute for the record which I have submitted to the Department a single despatch. As the record now stands, it is a chronological record of the situation as it developed and as I could report it to the Department. This, I think, for the purpose of the historical record, is the best way to leave it, and to substitute a single despatch in lieu thereof might give to the historian later a wrong impression of the degree and promptness with which we had informed the Department. My reason for marking the despatch No. 1505 for such limited circulation was because I mentioned therein the name of Dr. Ramos. It was impossible at the time of that writing to ferretell with certainty what the outcome of the situation would be. I felt the Department should know that it was Dr. Ramos who had informed me because it gave the Department the most definite indication that those closest to the

President

President and to Colonel Pedraza were cognizant of the gravity of the position. It is, of course, highly desirable that it not be known here, and for that reason known only to a few people in the Department, that Dr. Ramos was in touch with me. Fifteen years hence when any of this story may be published in "Foreign Relations", etc., it will not make any difference to any of the principals that this action of Dr. Ramos, which is all to his credit, be known.

I would be glad to have you give this your consideration and, unless you see some reason still for my doing so, I intend to let the record stand as it is, as it is the correct picture of the situation as it developed. I do believe that my 1505 should be indexed in the Department as a highly confidential document and I see no reason for its being given circulation in the Department outside of five or six persons. If the circulation is restricted to this degree, I see no possibility of any unfavorable developments for Dr. Ramos.

You will be interested to know that Dr. Ramos, as a result of these events, is more strong in his position than ever before. As the Minister of Defense, he is now the instrument through which the President is more and more handling all matters having to do with the armed forces. In other words, he is really carrying out the functions of a Minister of Defense in a constitutional and democratic Government. You will also be interested to know that after Colonel Pedraza arrived at Miami, he sent me a telegram reading as follows: "Muy agradecido por sus innumerables atenciones". He was referring to the help which we had given him and his family in getting away, all of which we did with the full knowledge and approval of the Government here.

The story is a dramatic one and I know that these developments came to you as a complete surprise, as they did to us. In this respect, we were not more surprised than the principal actors in the drama, including Batista and Pedraza. None of them had foreseen such a crucial situation arising. Every one here, except the Communists, seems to be highly satisfied, and even those who have been bitterly opposed to Batista consistently give him credit for the way in which he handled this situation. The Government has a great opportunity before it and it remains for us to see how they will use it. My own belief is that a good part of the way has been travelled in preparing the road for the solution of many problems. You may wish to show this letter to Mr. Welles, and you will know better than I whether there is enough of interest in it for him to take the time to read it.

I hope

1437

- 4 -

I hope the news you are getting from Larry Duggan
is good.

With all good wishes,

Cordially yours,

GEORGE S. MESSERSMITH.