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* *W.G. Vandegrift*
J.H.

Mexico, May 6, .942

My dear Mr. Secretary:

I am delighted to know that you are back in Washington and everyone tells me how well you are looking and how much good this so necessary rest has done you.

I arrived here the middle of February and have now been here almost three months. I am glad to say that on the whole the situation here is developing very satisfactorily. I have been a good deal occupied in my major work and I have had administrative and physical problems which had to be met. There are repairs going on in the office quarters which will not be completed for another two months at least. This has interfered with the conduct of our work somewhat and with the administrative changes I will eventually make. But I have secured rented quarters across the street from the Chancery which are most convenient and which have helped to meet our problem. I have been very much handicapped by the fact that the Embassy Residence was uninhabitable and needed emergency repairs. I will not go into this except to say that the Department took the necessary steps to enable me to proceed rapidly and the repairs I hope will be completed within the next month. In the meantime, I have been obliged to live in a hotel close to the Chancery. Completely aside from the personal inconvenience, which is relatively unimportant, I have lacked a proper place to establish contact with people here in the Government at the time when I needed it most. In spite of this handicap, however, which will soon be overcome, I have been able to establish very friendly and cordial contact with the President, who is a very sound, calm, understanding, and capable man. I have been able to establish contact of the kind we need with almost all of the important members of the Government and it has proven most helpful in building up background which is so important these days on so many of our common problems.

Concerning the decision of the Mexican Government to collaborate with us, there is no doubt whatever. The President, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the most responsible members of the Government are all decided on this line. We must, however, bear in mind that the position of the Government in taking this attitude of full
collaboration

The Honorable Cordell Hull,
Secretary of State, Washington.

collaboration short of declaring war is not an easy one for it, in view of the fact that a good part of the Mexican population is still apathetic with regard to the war and it would be unrealistic for us not to realize that a good many of them, especially among the agricultural sections, still hold all the old feelings with respect to us. The attitude of the industrial workers is somewhat better than that of the agricultural workers, in view of the fact that so many of them are in unions which have taken an attitude in favor of the democracies. There is, however, a good deal of lack of sympathy on the part of a large majority of the people with respect to the attitude the Government has taken. For this reason alone we cannot expect the Mexican Government to go further than it has gone for the present, and I myself am of the opinion that there would be no advantage whatever in Mexico's formally declaring war against the Axis powers at this time. She is giving all the material collaboration she could give, even though she were at war. The moral effect of the stand which the Mexican Government has taken has been felt in the other American Republics, so there would be nothing to be gained in that direction. On the other hand, I am fearful that a declaration of war by Mexico at this time would be so unacceptable to a good part of the people, even to many of those who are utterly with us, that the Government might have to take some steps backward rather than forward.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating; and the fact that when we go almost daily to high officials of the Mexican Government requesting some form of collaboration or other in the war effort, we invariably get it and without delay. I think, therefore, that we can take it that the situation is as good as we could expect it to be, and perhaps a good deal better than we could hope it to be here.

In the way of military cooperation we are getting it slowly but satisfactorily, but there are difficulties in view of the fact that General Cárdenas is using his position as a sort of nuisance value in order that President Avila Camacho will not do too much in the way of further forward steps in the field of religion, education, and labor. I do not think that Cárdenas has any idea of making political troubles, because I think he realizes that he could not, but he does like to maintain a nuisance value so that things will not go too far away from the direction he had taken. I see no probabilities of internal difficulties in Mexico, and for Mexico the situation is indeed relatively quiet and stable.

You may hear a good deal about this or that aspect of the Mexican Government, but from all that I can learn
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the present Government is about as good, if not the best, that Mexico has ever enjoyed. She is fortunate in having as President a man who is understanding, calm, considered, and surprisingly well-informed, and who is personally honest. He is a man of very good political judgment and has been proceeding in a very sound and sane way. Concerning his personal convictions with respect to the war, his sympathies with the United Nations and his realization of the necessity for cooperation with us are beyond doubt.

Señor Padilla returned to Mexico last evening and is spending the day with the President. I expect to see him tomorrow. I could not meet him on his arrival as he came in unexpectedly by automobile and went directly to his home. I do not know whether you had the opportunity of seeing him in Washington, but he is an extraordinary man who is, I am convinced, sincere in his convictions and action. The relationship between him and the President is good. During his absence in the United States, as Padilla himself foresaw, his enemies made political capital of his trip, imputing to him personal ambitions, etc. Padilla's strength does not lie among the masses in Mexico, but among the more understanding people. There is no doubt that certain political jealousies within the Government have been accentuated by his visit to our country. I am confident, however, that the relationship between him and the President remains unimpaired, and that he is a man of such sound judgment and desire to serve that he will know how to allay the fears of his colleagues.

Of the details of cooperation I will not write you at this time, as this is a broad subject and one into which I would have to go too deeply. I think Sumner knows my views quite fully. It is important, now that Padilla is back, that we proceed as rapidly as possible with some of the projects which have been approved in principle. It will not be possible, I believe, to go ahead with all at once. But it would be a very disastrous thing for us here, as well as for Mexico in the end, if we did not make as rapid progress on as many of the projects agreed upon as possible. I need not stress this, for you will realize the implications which I have in mind. I may say I think the most important thing we have to do without delay is to help in improving the railway and road facilities of Mexico, for unless we do what we can there, we cannot get out the materials which we so desperately need from this country and which Mexico is prepared to produce. Nor can we get here the things which Mexico needs to keep an already delicately adjusted economy going.

We had a Consular Conference here of the officers in Mexico, last week, and it proved to be most helpful. Wayne
Taylor

Taylor came down and I took him to see the President, who spoke principally about the ~~trade~~ agreement under negotiation. He spoke of it in most understanding terms and you will be interested to know that he was interested in the long-range aspects more than in the immediate. He said he was reading all the studies which the Mexican experts were preparing. He showed in various ways his understanding of the problems and he kept emphasizing the importance of bearing in mind the long-range aspects of our ~~trade~~ relations. He conceived of our political relations as being on a basis of collaboration not only now but for the future. He therefore said he had to conceive of our economic relationships on which these political relationships would have to be based from a long-range point of view also. I am sure our own people will be actuated in these ~~trade~~ agreement negotiations by the same spirit. It would be unwise for us not to avail ourselves of the present moment of better atmosphere.

I have of course been very much disturbed about the recent Executive Order with respect to the Board of Economic Warfare, which would have so seriously affected the Department and which in my opinion would practically have put it out of business. The effect of the Order, if it had been carried through in all its implications, would have been disastrous for our country at home and abroad and I do not see how we could have continued our foreign relations in anything like an orderly or effective fashion now or in the future. If the Order had been carried through in its original form and intent it seems clear the Department would not have been able to conduct our foreign relations in the proper way and our diplomatic and consular establishments and our chiefs of mission in the field would have lost practically all their utility to the Government. Our Government would have lost face before every one of the other American Republics and confidence in us and in our capacity to win the war would have been materially lessened if not destroyed completely at a time when it is so important for us not only to retain that confidence but to strengthen it in every possible way and to maintain morale in the political and economic field.

I was confident that the President had not been informed of the full implications and extent of this Executive Order when it had been presented to him. I know his thorough and extraordinary knowledge not only of our foreign relations but also of the necessity for certain principles of practice and order therein. The President, having such knowledge of the details of our foreign relations as to bring about the consolidation of our foreign services, would not have introduced into the conduct of our foreign relations a new factor in time of war which would create infinitely more dangerous and destructive
practices

practices than those which existed during the multiple approach which we had to other governments before the consolidation of the foreign services. I was confident that this matter had not been presented to him in its true light and that there had been no consultation with the other Departments and agencies concerned.

I am therefore infinitely happy to know that the matter has been cleared up and that even though the Executive Order will not be changed for the present the President has given specific directives that the Department of State in Washington and our missions abroad remain in control of the conduct of our foreign relations and all approaches to other governments. I shudder to think of what the consequences would have been in these times of stress, if the Order had been carried through in its original form and intent.

I have received a letter from Dean Ackerman of the Columbia School of Journalism which I think is of sufficient interest for you to read. I am enclosing it herewith as well as a copy of my reply. Dean Ackerman of course is a very understanding person who knows what the conduct of foreign relations means and he was appalled by this approach made to him by a representative of the Office of Facts and Figures who in substance informed him that the conduct of foreign relations was now with the BEW and not with the Department of State. You will be amused when you read in his letter that this representative of the Office of Facts and Figures referred to you, Sumner Welles and myself as "the appeasers of the State Department." This person, so truly lacking in background and knowledge as to take such an attitude, was one of those who undoubtedly believed himself to be chosen to conduct our foreign affairs under the new Executive Order.

I need not tell you how deeply happy I am that you have had such a good rest and have returned to your arduous duties in such good form. I refrained from writing you while you were away as I did not wish to burden you with anything from here. Marion joins in affectionate regard to you and Mrs. Hull.

Cordially and faithfully yours,

G. S. MESSERSMITH

Enclosures:

Copy of Dr. Ackerman's letter to Mr. Messersmith of April 27, 1942.

Copy of Mr. Messersmith's reply of May 2, 1942.

GSM:KCT