

SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA.

[August 8.]

CONFIDENTIAL.

SECTION 1.

[A 4751/2776/47]

No. 1.

*Mr. Morris to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston,—(Received August 8.)*

(No. 55. Confidential.)

My Lord,

Caracas, July 20, 1923.

WITH reference to my confidential despatch No. 48 of the 6th July and my telegram of the 10th July relating to the present political situation, I now have the honour to report more fully to your Lordship on the subject. The position assumes importance in view of the possibility that the assassination of the President's brother may be taken advantage of to foment another revolution in the country.

The last revolutionary movement—and it may be useful briefly to recall the circumstances of that movement—was in 1921. It was organised in Europe, chiefly in Paris, by two political exiles, Señor Ortega Martínez and Señor F. L. Alcantara, assisted by Señor Carabano, a Venezuelan general, and William Henry Quilliam, a British subject, of 33, Gordon Square, London. Assistance was also obtained—and without this assistance the development of the plot might not have been possible—of Señor Charles Villanueva, a Venezuelan subject, who was formerly in the Venezuelan Legation in Paris and before that Venezuelan consul-general in London, but was dismissed from the service of the Venezuelan Government and afterwards became Nicaraguan Chargé d'Affaires in Paris. As such he supplied the conspirators with Nicaraguan diplomatic passports with visas for England and France.

The revolutionaries purchased the steamship "Odin," and took her to Amsterdam to be fitted out with arms and ammunition from Germany. The ex-British gunboat "Harrier" was also acquired for the sum of 42,000*l.*, and these two boats were intended to co-operate with land forces to be organised on the Colombian frontier. Owing to the plot being discovered through the efforts of the Venezuelan Minister at The Hague, the "Odin" was sequestered at Amsterdam and the "Harrier" at Swansea. Notwithstanding the capture of these two ships, however, the revolution started on the Colombian frontier, and it was only after some fighting that the rebels were forced to capitulate. For a time the revolutionary movement was checked, but the promoters of the movement remain at liberty, and from all accounts are merely awaiting another opportunity to move again. The natural corollary of any weakening of the Government will be to raise the hopes of these men to the possibilities of a fresh attempt.

It may now be of interest to review the position of the Government. Though nominally a representative Government, it is in reality an oligarchy. The President, who entirely dominates the Government, is a rough peasant, without education and almost inarticulate, but gifted with great force of character, much natural shrewdness and the power to govern. About a year ago to strengthen his position, he arranged for his brother and son to be elected vice-presidents, investing them with the right of succession. Now the brother has been assassinated, this precautionary measure, owing to the unpopularity of the son, seems likely to prove a menace to the strength of the President's position. With advancing years, ill health, the unsleeping vigilance of his enemies, and the loss of his brother, the strain may at any time become too much for him. It is these circumstances that give rise to the apprehension that prevails of a fresh revolutionary movement. In certain well-informed quarters it is thought that some such movement may occur at any moment, and to some extent this opinion would seem to be held by the Government. People are being arrested on the slightest suspicion for political reasons, and, without trial, being cast into prison, with the prospect possibly, of not being heard of again.

The American Minister called on me a few days ago. His visit was purely a friendly one and ostensibly for no special reason, but it left very clearly on my mind the impression that he was greatly concerned with the outlook. He said that though a revolution had often been hinted at, this was the first time he had ever regarded the possibility seriously. His military attaché has just returned from the Colombian frontier, where the revolutionary spirit is most active, and his reports are probably not reassuring. The American Minister, however, though a man of affairs and wide

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