SECRET

Subject: Repercussions Caused by Papal Decoration of Cuba's First Lady.

The Honorable
The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to report that the recent conferring of a high Papal decoration on Cuba's notorious First Lady, Señora Paulina Alsina viuda de Grau, has created a great deal of unfavorable comment in both clerical and lay circles.

At an elaborate ceremony at the Presidential Palace on June 10, 1948, the Papal Nuncio, Monsignor Antonio TATTI, acting for Pope Pius XII, decorated the First Lady with the "Medaglia Benemerenti" in recognition of her services to the Catholic Church in Cuba. The ceremony was attended by President Grau, President-elect Carlos Prio, members of the Cabinet and Diplomatic Corps, the Cardinal Archbishop of Habana, high-ranking military and naval officers and a large number of civilians. The third floor of the Palace was elaborately decorated and a sumptuous buffet with champagne was served.

The Diario de la Marina of June 11 reports that the First Lady, interviewed by one of its reporters, estimated that because of her influence the Government had donated more than 12,000,000 pesos (U.S. $12,000,000) to various Catholic institutions in Cuba.

As the Department is well aware, since the early days of the Grau Administration the First Lady's name has been connected with virtually all of the large-scale graft in which various officials of this Government have been involved. Consequently, in the eyes of the Cuban people the First Lady is one of the ring-leaders of the dishonest clique that has taken such a heavy
heavy toll of the Treasury. Under these conditions it is not surprising that many Cubans, especially devout Catholics, have been shocked and chagrined - all the more so because she is the first Cuban woman to receive this signal honor from the Holy See. The Embassy has learned from a source considered very reliable that the conferring of the decoration - a blow to the prestige of the Church - was arranged by the Papal Nuncio without consulting the Cardinal.

Respectfully yours,

For the Ambassador:

Lester D. Mallory
Counselor of Embassy