

NATIONALISM IN CUBA, 1902-1933

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The main goal of this paper is to find out if some kind of nationalist feeling existed among different sectors of the Cuban society between 1902 and 1933. The sectors which will be emphasized are the working classes, the upper and middle classes, and the university students. The intellectuals' attitude will not be analyzed because their standing with respect to nationalism is very well known. The year 1902 has been chosen to start the research because in that year the American military occupation of Cuba ended and the civil government created by the Constitution of 1901 began to function. The study will end in 1933, when a revolution that signaled the end of an era and the beginning of another occurred.

Different authors have given different definitions to the concept of nationalism. Here will be emphasized that which defines nationalism as a form of group consciousness which identifies the fortunes of group members with those of a nation state.¹ One trait of nationalism is the devotion to the ideal of achieving an independent nation-state and preserving its freedom of action once that status is attained.² Another characteristic is the existence of the belief that goals of economic, social, cultural, and political progress, however they may be defined, can only be accomplished through the framework of national independence and national effort and energy.³

The Political Situation of Cuba: 1902-1924

Cuba was a colony of Spain until 1898 when its rule ended by the Spanish-American War. The United States occupied the Island and maintained a military government in it for three years. In 1902 the military occupation ended and a civil government, created by the Constitution of 1901 (which had to be approved by the United States government), began to function. This document provided for the creation of a republican government in which separation of powers would prevail. Cuba, however, did not achieve a complete political independence, for the United States maintained a strong influence over the internal affairs of the island, due in great part to the existence of the Platt Amendment in the Cuban constitution. The American government conditioned its approval of the constitution on the inclusion of that clause by its framers. The amendment gave the United States the right to maintain military bases in the island, and the right "to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property and individual liberty, and for discharging the obligations with respect to Cuba imposed by the Treaty of Paris."⁴ The North American government could in effect intervene in Cuban affairs whenever it saw fit.

¹E. M., *Sart, Political Institutions: A Preface*, New York, Appleton Century, 1938, pp. 341-351.

²H. Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History*, Princeton, Van Nostrand, 1955, p. 10; B. C. Shafer, *Nationalism: Myth and Reality*, London Gollancz, 1955, pp. 7-8.

³Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History*, p. 10.

⁴See the complete text in Wyatt Mac Gaffey and Clifford Barnett, *Twentieth Century Cuba*, New York, Doubleday, 1965, p. 17.

During the period studied, the United States intervened repeatedly in Cuba's internal affairs by landing troops on it or by threatening to do so. The principal justification for such interventions was maintaining order in an environment that sometimes became so volatile as to jeopardize American interests on the island. Between 1902 and 1924, many Cuban governments turned out to be corrupt or inept, and, in most cases, the real objective of the political leadership was to rise to power in order to distribute positions and privileges among its followers. Several times (in 1906, in 1908, in 1917, and in 1921) opposition groups revolted or threatened to revolt claiming, not without reason, that elections had been fraudulent.⁵ One of the goals sought by these rebels was to create a crisis that would force the United States to intervene in the island. Using this tactic, the opposition groups hoped to eventually control the government. These groups sometimes succeeded and sometimes did not, but the consequences of such a state of things were politically disastrous for Cuba.

The main effect of this situation was to pluralize the Cuban political system. The American interventions in the internal affairs of the republic prevented the early consolidation of a strong and capable central government in Cuba and fostered the rise and entrenchment of opposition groups by increasing political uncertainty. The sources of political power multiplied and no single group, not even the government, could impose its will on Cuban society for long. Under these circumstances, the development of a system of strong political cleavages that might have served as a foundation for an effective and stable party system was impossible.⁶

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

Two important economic developments occurred during these years: a tremendous expansion of sugar cultivation, and a growing penetration and domination of American capital. These phenomena represented the acceleration of earlier trends, and their impact and influence were deeply felt in Cuban society during the period.

The conditions described were encouraged by two factors. The Platt Amendment was the first. Its fourth clause ratified and validated "all the acts of the United States in Cuba during its military occupancy." During this occupation, American military authorities had given concessions to United States' enterprises in various fields, particularly public utilities. One result of that provision was the assurance that none of these concessions could later be declared invalid by any native Cuban government.

More important than these concessions were the changes that were taking place in the sugar industry. A profound technological revolution had begun in the sugar industry even before the United States' intervention in Cuba.⁷ During the North American occupation, those tendencies toward technological advance were greatly accelerated, under the impact of the protected American capital which invaded the island. As more and more modern mills were constructed, more and more land had to be

⁵Luis Aguilar, *Cuba 1933: Prologue to Revolution*, Ithaca, Cornell Univ. Press, 1972, pp. 33-34.

⁶Jorge I. Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution*, Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 1978, p. 13.

⁷Sidney W. Mintz in foreword to Ramiro Guerra, *Azúcar y población en las Antillas*, 3er ed., Havana, Cultural, 1944.

devoted to growing sugar cane to keep pace with plant capacity. The old system of communal lands began to disappear.⁸ During the period of United States' occupation, the communal estates were divided by a special court process and this laid the foundation for the acquisition and development of vast tracts of land by American corporations. The process was facilitated by the fact that the suppression of Cuban resistance by the Spaniards through such policies as "reconcentración" (making Cuban cities virtual concentration camps for the rural population) had ruined many Cuban landholders and practically wiped out the island's agriculture. Title IV of the Platt Amendment, "gave legal blessing and some degree of permanence to these land grabs." This process of land grabbing continued after the civil government was established and it has been estimated that by 1927 American individuals or corporations controlled about 8,150,000 acres of Cuban land as owners or as renters.⁹

The second factor was the Treaty of Reciprocity of 1903. It assured Cuba a 20 per cent tariff preference on all its sugar entering the United States. In practice, Cuba could now export all the sugar it wanted to the United States. However, in return for this "concession", the island had to grant tariff preferences to a number of American products. The Treaty had the effect of precluding Cuba from developing a diversified economy, and of forcing it to depend on just one product for its survival.¹⁰

For a time this economic arrangement seemed to work well. By 1902, sugar had become the main source of the island's national income, leaving other resources (like cattle, tobacco, and coffee), far behind. Between 1903 and 1914, Cuba's sugar production and exportation to the United States more than doubled. In 1900 the isle's share of world sugar production was 2.7 per cent; in 1915 it had increased to 15.4 per cent.¹² The First World War added tremendous momentum to this expansion. Producers of sugar such as Germany and Austro-Hungary stopped exporting.¹³ Cuba took advantage of this situation and filled this vacuum by increasing its production at a terrific pace. The prices of sugar soared. To augment their profits, many sugar corporations absorbed lands previously dedicated to coffee, cattle and subsistence crops. Sugar became the all powerful king of the island, and thanks to it the Cuban economy expanded tremendously. But this apparent prosperity was fragile: more than ever Cuba depended on just one product, which was vulnerable to the oscillations of the market. If for some reason, the price of sugar dropped, the island's economy could suffer a lot.

Moreover, much of the sugar production was not controlled by Cubans, but by Americans. United States' private investment of capital on

⁸Robert B. Batchelder, "The Evolution of Cuban Land Tenure and its Relation to Certain Agro-Economic Problems", *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 3, December, 1952, p. 243.

⁹Samuel Farber, *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba, 1933-1960: A Political Sociology from Machado to Castro*, Middletown, Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1976, p. 32
Batchelder, "The Evolution of Cuban of Land Tenure and its Relation to Certain Agro-Economic Problems", p. 244.

¹⁰Aguilar, *Cuba 1933: Prologue to Revolution*, p. 24; Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*. New York, Harper and Row, 1971, p. 469.

¹¹Resúmenes estadísticos seleccionados, *Havana, Ministerio de Hacienda*, 1959, p. 26.

¹²Anuario azucarero, *Havana, Ministerio del Comercio Exterior*, 1961, pp. XXV, 27, 33; José R. Alvarez Díaz, *A Study on Cuba*, Coral Gables, Miami Univ. Press, 1964, p. 233.

¹³Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*, p. 537.

this product increased from about \$30,000,000 in 1906, to \$500,000,000 in 1927. A great part of that capital was used to construct modern sugar mills. By 1919, American interests owned 68 of the 209 mills that existed in Cuba. They accounted for 15 per cent of the sugar output in 1901, for 35 per cent in 1915 and for 62.5 in 1927.¹⁴

The social impact of these events was enormous. The old hacendado class which had already been weakened by the transformation that took place in the sugar production at the end of the XIX century (from hacienda to plantation) and by the independence wars, became even weaker. Also, a great part of the rural middle class lost their lands to foreign corporations which controlled mills. These "independent" farmers became "vassals of the mills."¹⁵ Finally, the process of disintegration of the communal lands was accelerated and many poor peasants became workers in the mills; they were now a rural proletariat. The working conditions they had to endure were bad, but in reality, their standard of living improved to some degree.

Several sectors benefitted from the existing conditions. Professionals (such as corporate lawyers and managers), merchants, and some land-owners adapted to what was taking place and prospered. They came to constitute the new middle and upper classes of Cuban society.

The beginning of 1920 marked the peak of the sugar boom. However, by the second half of that year, disaster struck. European producers recovered from the havoc created by World War I and began to produce significant amounts of sugar. This caused a dramatic drop in the price of the product, something that had a devastating effect on Cuba's economy and which produced much suffering in every sector of the island's society. Notwithstanding this, by 1923 the economic situation had stabilized somewhat and, apparently, things continued as before.¹⁶

Nationalism Among the Working Classes

During this period a sense of nationalism, as defined in the introduction, practically did not exist among the working classes. Jorge Mañach has developed a theory about the attitude of the Cuban lower classes centered on the "choteo", an ironic response to most aspects of life that was widespread in Cuba. According to Mañach, "the Cuban is generally happy if he is not bothered. He remains aloof from, and even acquiescent to, the arrogance and the excessive rigors of authority so long as he does not suffer personal injury himself." As long as he has enough to provide for himself and for his family he accepts the authority that is in power.¹⁷ As Ramón Ruiz has affirmed: "his job, the amount of his take-

¹⁴José R. Alvarez Díaz, et. al., *A Study on Cuba*, Coral Gables, Univ. of Miami Press, 1965, p. 238; Archibald Rittler, *The Economic Development of Revolutionary Cuba*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1974, p. 18.

¹⁵Guerra, *Azúcar y población en las Antillas*, p. 67.

¹⁶Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *Cuba: The Making of a Revolution*, New York, W.W. Norton and Co., 1970, p. 49.

¹⁷Jorge Mañach, *Indagación del choteo*, Havana, Editorial Lex, 1936, pp. 19-20, 31, 40-41, 54-57, 62-63, 65, 71, 74.

home pay, and the welfare of his family largely determined the attitude of the worker."¹⁸

In this period, the conditions of the working classes were not quite good, but overall, their standards of living improved. The enormous economic growth created by King Sugar explained the improvement.¹⁹ While that system provided decent living conditions for them and their families, the workers would not question its legitimacy.

During the economic crisis of 1920-1923 various manifestations of discontent occurred. There were strikes of port workers, railway workers, and, for the first time, of sugar mill workers. They were organized, mainly, by anarcho-syndicalist union leaders, and some signs of nationalism could be found among them. But such manifestations were few (and easily repressed by the government of President Alberto Zayas whose main actions were directed, not against the workers, but against the anarcho-syndicalist leadership) and a nationalist mood cannot be inferred from them. By 1924, all the working organizations-with the logical exception of the anarcho-syndicalists and of a small group of socialist intellectuals and labor leaders who would help to found the Cuban Communist Party in 1925-were at peace with the government, and with the United States.²⁰ The economic system established in great part by the latter was not seriously challenged.

NATIONALISM AMONG THE UPPER AND MIDDLE CLASSES

The new middle and upper classes accommodated themselves to the neocolonial situation that existed. Their members perceived the interests of the Cuban nation and their own as being ineluctably bound to those of "enlightened international forces within the United States."²¹ They showed what can be called a moderate economic nationalism, whose principal goal was to stabilize the effects of American economic penetration in Cuba. This form of nationalism was not so much anti-American as it was essentially pro-Cuban.²² However, it was doubly flawed, because the need to accommodate to North American interests, precluded the creation

¹⁸Estimated real national per capita income, 1903-1933 (in 1926 pesos)

Year	Income	Year	Income	Year	Income	Year	Income
1903	176	1912	244	1922	214	1932	108
1904	198	1913	223	1923	232	1933	109
1905	228	1914	234	1924	239		
1906	204	1915	289	1925	199		
1907	188	1916	283	1926	172		
1908	181	1917	210	1927	188		
1909	206	1918	198	1928	164		
1910	222	1919	214	1929	159		
1911	199	1920	257	1931	136		

Source: Julián Alienes Urosa, *Características fundamentales de la economía cubana*, Havana, Banco Nacional, p. 52.

¹⁹Jules, Benjamin, "The Machadato and Cuba Nationalism, 1928-1932", *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 55, no. 1, February, 1975 pp. 69-70.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 66.

²¹Aguilar, *Cuba 1933: Prologue*, p. 46; Philip Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro and the United States*, Pittsburgh, Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1971, pp. 44-47.

²²Benjamin, "The Machadato and Cuba Nationalism, 1928-1932, p. 66.

of an emotional commitment to Cuban nationhood that would inspire mass allegiance, and because it undercut any commitment to implement significant political or economic reforms.²³

The existence of this moderate nationalism was explained by two reasons. First, although most of the members of the Cuban upper and middle classes benefitted enormously from the increasing United States presence, they were uneasy about the cultural shocks administered to Cuban society by the formidable penetration of American capital, goods and ideas. In addition, Cuban nationalism and the myths surrounding Cuba's long struggle for independence made politically unwise, if not psychologically impossible, for even these beneficiaries of America's capital to accept the annexionist implication of the existing situation.²⁴

The uneasiness of these classes increased when the 1920-1923 economic crisis occurred. They were decimated by it and this made them realize more clearly than ever before that they were only mere adjuncts of American dominance.²⁵ For this reason, they received warmly the coming to power of President Gerardo Machado, who had repeatedly promised to gain some control over the pace and direction of United States' investment on Cuba. Machado offered exactly what these classes wanted: the establishment and consolidation of a moderate economic nationalism.

Nationalism Among University Students

As a social group the overwhelming majority of the university students were of middle and upper class background.²⁶ All studied at the University of Havana, which was the only institution of higher learning in Cuba. Although a technically oriented curriculum was already available, most students continued studying in the Faculties of Law and Medicine. The inability of a dependent Cuban economy to absorb all these aspiring professionals, the influx of radical ideas from the Mexican and Russian revolutions, and the conservative attitude of most of the faculties, combined to turn the student generation of the twenties toward the issue of university reform and social change.²⁷ These concerns, arising within the context of a hemisphere-wide climate of anti-Yankeeism among intellectuals, would lead the more radical students to attack United States' influence. However, most students disregarded the preachings of the radicals and concentrated their energies on gaining a number of university reforms. They held a number of demonstrations, but the objectives they pursued were not nationalistic in character.

In 1922 a group of students formed an association called the **Manicatos** in order to develop sports at the University, and to challenge the aristocratic teams from private clubs. Very soon this group advanced to other areas and began to advocate the implementation of changes in the educational structure of the University. In January 1923, under the leadership of Julio Antonio Mella, the students forcibly occupied the University and demanded the dismissal of professors whom they

²⁴Leland Jack, *Our Cuban Colony*, New York, Vanguard Press, 1928, p. 232.

²⁵Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro and the United States*, p. 47.

²⁶Farber, *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba, 1933-1960: A Political Sociology from Machado to Castro*, p. 59.

²⁷Jaime Suchlicki, *University Students and Revolution in Cuba, 1920-1968*. Coral Gables, Univ. of Miami Press, 1969, pp. 18-19.

considered modicacious, inefficient or corrupt, the modernization of textbooks, a greater autonomy for the University, and free education for all.²⁸ The demonstration succeeded and the students obtained most of what they demanded.²⁹ In 1923 the **Federación Estudiantil Universitaria** (FEE) was formed to press for academic reforms. The organization's secretary, Julio Antonio Mella—far more radical than his fellow students—also raised the question of governmental corruption and of American imperialism, thereby, tending to enlarge the impact of student demands.³⁰ However, Mella constituted an exception to the rule and during these years most student's protests remained focused on intramural matters.

Nationalism: 1924-1933 The Economic Situation

After 1924 the economic and political conditions of Cuba started to change. In the economic sphere the existing structures began to fall apart. After the 1920-1923 crisis, Cuba's economy apparently returned to normalcy. But the reality was that the island had never fully recovered from that crisis. Between 1924 and 1927, Cuba maintained a high volume of sugar exports to the United States, but since prices had come down from 1923 levels, the total value of sugar exported to America had really been drastically reduced.³¹ The recovery of many sugar production, and the existence of an international trend toward protectionism also helped to keep Cuban economy precariously balanced. To cope with the situation, Machado was forced to contract several loans with a number of American banks. By 1927 the country had received more than \$100 million in loans. However, these loans did not alter the general trend prevailing in the Cuban economy. The revenues of the national budget for example, fell from \$84,791,000 in 1925-26 to \$80,988,000 in 1927-28.³²

In 1929, the world depression began. Cuba's economic conditions became somber and desperate. The spread of mystery throughout all the sectors of the population was tremendous. In 1928 the price of sugar was 2.18 cents per pound, a rather low price which had forced Cuba to readjust her economy but which still permitted a certain economic stability. After 1929, the sugar market collapsed. In that year the product's price dropped to 1.72 cents per pound. Things were to get worse: in 1930 the price dropped to 1.23 cents; in 1931—after the American government had adopted the Hawley-Smoot tariff—it fell to 1.09 cents, and in 1932, in what seemed to be an irreversible trend toward total collapse, the price of sugar dropped to the all-time low price of .57 cents a pound. In 1929 the Cuban sugar crop had a value of \$225,100,000; in 1933 its value was only \$53,700,000, less than one fourth the 1929 total.³³

²⁸Julio A. Mella, "La agitación universitaria de la Habana", *Juventud*, No. 6, June, 1925, p. 4.

²⁹Raul Rosa, *Retorno a la alborada*, Santa Clara, Clariformia, Vol. I, 1964, pp. 234-251; Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit*, p. 505.

³⁰Julio A. Mella, *Documentos para su vida*, Comisión Nacional Cubana de la UNESCO, 1964, pp. 129-131.

³¹Alvarez, *A study on Cuba*, p. 248.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 217.

³³Anuario azucarero, Havana, Ministerio de Hacienda, 1959, pp. 37-38.

This time Cuba could not rely, as she had in the past, on other products. For example, tobacco which was the second most important product, had undergone a severe decline partly because much of the land dedicated to its cultivation had been absorbed by the all powerful sugar industry. Its exportation dropped from \$43,067,000 in 1929 to just \$13,861,000 in 1933.³⁴

The results of the crisis were felt all over Cuba. In 1929 the government was still talking of expanding trade and industry; by January 1930 it announced a general reduction in the salaries of all public employees with the exception of soldiers.³⁵ By March 1930, there were protests throughout the island because of the delay in paying the wages of teachers and agricultural workers.³⁶ At the same time prices for export goods continued to drop and unemployment increased dramatically.³⁷ The economic structures were crumbling.

POLITICAL SITUATION

In 1924 Gerardo Machado became President of Cuba. Practically all the groups with some kind of political consciousness supported him, because he had promised to fulfill their desires of creating a program based on implementing a moderate economic nationalism and in ending all governmental corruption. His actions up to 1926, seemed to fulfill such expectations. However, even during these years, he took a number of repressive measures, especially against laborers, that foreshadowed his future authoritarian behavior.

By the end of 1926, Machado began to behave like a dictator. He wanted to be re-elected (the constitution prohibited this) and started to show great appetite for power. On November 11, 1926 he advised the provincial delegation of his party as follows:

My government hopes to go on receiving, as up to now the decided cooperation of the Congress, but if it should not have it, for the benefit of our Fatherland, under the banner of the Constitution, I, myself alone, am capable of avoiding two years of lost effort.

He added:

I know that some of those who are hearing me will brand my declarations as anti-constitutional and will think that I am a disguised partisan of dictatorship: but if dictatorship were necessary to keep alive the memory of those who fell on the field of heroism, I, myself alone, with the help of those of you who are willing to follow me, am more than capable of carrying out this purpose. So now you know where I stand. The press can reproduce my words. Perhaps those who disagree will not be against me, but I will be against them.³⁸

³⁴Alvarez, A study, p. 362.

³⁵Diario de la Marina, Jan. 9, 1930, p. 1.

³⁶El País, March 6, 1930, p. 1.

³⁷Aguilar, Cuba 1933, pp. 59-60.

³⁸Revista parlamentaria de Cuba, vol. VI, Nov. —Dec., 1926, pp. 268-269.

In 1927, Machado prevailed upon the Cuban Congress and forced it to initiate a series of resolutions seeking to extend the term of office of the President.³⁹ These resolutions were adopted in 1928 as constitutional amendments by a Machado controlled constitutional convention. After they were approved, this body called upon Machado to accept a new term in office.⁴⁰ All the political parties endorsed the President's candidacy, and he was elected to a new and extended (six years instead of four) term in 1928.

This act of "continuismo" forced Machado to retreat from his moderate nationalistic position in favor of a policy based on giving unrestricted privileges to the North Americans. He acted in this way because he thought that he could handle the local opposition very well but not survive a break with the United States. Machado's policy of granting enormous privileges to American corporations at the expense of sacrificing the interests of the local sectors, worked for a while. The United States became one of the strongest supporters of Machado, and it constantly reaffirmed its support and its friendship to his administration.⁴¹ However, the measures taken by the dictator to secure America's support injured the interest of many Cuban sectors, which slowly began to feel much resentment, not only against him, but also against the United States.

Machado's actions also had the effect of making Cuban economy more dependent than ever before on the United States. Unfortunately for him—and for Cuba—the approval of those measures roughly coincided with the onset of the 1929 world depression which literally "tore the heart out of the Cuban export economy, set back Cuban living standards some thirty years or more, and made unemployment and destitution the lot of most Cubans."⁴² The economic crisis helped to create a wide opposition to Machado's regime. His government, instead of reacting with flexibility, increased the number of repressive measures that had been in use for some time. This, in turn, fed the ranks of opposition and violence increased. These events also had the effect of arising nationalist feelings among the groups studied. This sentiment turned out to be anti-American in nature.

THE WORKERS

By 1924 the anarcho-syndicalists were the only organized labor group that had not made peace with the government. In 1925, they founded the **Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba (CNOC)** which would be the strongest union until 1935. The government took repressive measures against the leadership of this organization (assassinations, deportations, etc.) and decimated it. By 1928, that leadership vacuum was filled by the Cuban Communist Party which had been founded in 1925.

³⁹Texto del proyecto de reforma de la constitución: Havana, Congreso de la República, p. 927.

⁴⁰Diario de sesiones de la Asamblea Constituyente, Havana, Vol. 28, 12th session, p. 5.

⁴¹Aguilar, Cuba, pp. 88-91.

⁴²An example of this is a law proposed by Machado and approved by Congress that would authorize the companies controlling electricity and transportation (all of them American) to expropriate land, property, or rights pertaining to the Cuban state or to private citizens, and; reduce substantially the taxes to be paid by those companies. Aguilar, Cuba, p. 64.

⁴³Benjamin, "The Machado and Cuba Nationalis", p. 67.

Before 1929, the majority of the workers did not respond to the organizing drives of the militant unions. This changed after the world depression began. Economic growth ended, and the worker's income declined sharply. Their mobilization increased rapidly.⁴⁴ By the early 1930s all major trades, with the notable exception of the sugar industry, were highly organized. Most of the union's members were strongly opposed to the Machado policies which they blamed for their declining condition. These organizations reacted to Machado's repression with strikes in which both political and economic demands were asked for. When in 1930, Machado declared the most radical of the unions illegal, a general strike was called. The shutdown was only partially successful, but was followed thereafter by a long series of militant work stoppages by one union or another. By this time, the legal structure of labor-management relations had all but disappeared, and the police state that was soon to descend on other political elements had already begun to function in regard to labor.

Due to the politico-economic crisis, labor leaders began to succeed in organizing the largest proletarian group in the island on a mass scale: the sugar mill and cane field workers. Faced with worsened conditions, sugar worker strikes broke out during the 1931-1932 harvest and in late 1932, the first national sugar worker union (**Sindicato Nacional de Obreros de la Industria Azucarera**) was formed. *By 1933, Cuban labor was more highly organized and radically led than almost any proletarian group in Latin America.*⁴⁵ *This fact coupled with the existence of a dictatorial and an anti-labor government, and of severe economic hardship, made for an explosive situation.*

Although most workers came to blame their conditions and the repression loosened against their manifestations on Machado, they did not consider that he was acting independently. They believed that the dictator was a surrogate of Yankee imperialism; that he was just responding to American interests. It was this relationship between Machado and the United States, that the different organizations, which directed and organized the workers, constantly emphasized as the key to understanding the deplorable conditions that prevailed.⁴⁵ Understandably, such a situation provoked the nationalistic feelings of many members of the working classes, and this sentiment came to be anti-American in nature.

The Upper and Middle Classes

As seen, these classes supported a moderate economic nationalism whose principal goal was to stabilize the effects of the economic penetration of the United States. They supported Machado because they believed that he would fulfill their expectations. However, the dictator betrayed these hopes. Not only did he disregard the interests of these classes in favor of those of the Americans, but he also responded to the social and economic tensions created by the depression by imposing

constraints upon the political arena (party-government amalgamation, continuismo, suspension of constitutional guarantees, censorship etc.). Slowly many members of the middle class began to identify him as the prime cause of these tensions.⁴⁷

Some sectors decided to join the movement against Machado. The most intransigent and best known middle class organization was the one known as "ABC". It became notorious for using terrorist tactics. Its Program Manifesto, issued in 1932, stated that the ABC's goal was "not only to get rid of the present tyrannical regime but also of the causes that had determined its existence." It asserted that Cuba's troubles derived from her dependent economic status. To solve this problem, the program called for the state's intervention in the economy in order to control the latifundium, protect the native farming class, regulate major corporations, nationalize public services, establish a native banking system, establish a progressive taxation, protect the small merchant and industrial classes and inaugurate protective labor legislation. Although in the political sphere the program called for the establishment of a corporately based upper house and for narrowing the franchise to the literate classes, it also included programs of civil liberties and demilitarization.⁴⁸ The Manifesto attempted to solve the problem of dependency without accepting the mass or class doctrines usually considered the only non-reactionary alternatives.⁴⁹

This program reflected a nationalist feeling. The ABC members blamed Cuba's dependent economic status on the United States for most of the island's ills. To get rid of the chaotic situation that existed, Cuba's dependency on America had to be drastically reduced. As in the case of the working classes, this middle class group adopted an anti-American nationalistic stance only when the economic and political situation of Cuba became so deplorable that it perceived its survival as being seriously threatened.

Not all the sectors of the upper and middle classes favored the ABC's program and actions. The few groups that prospered under the existing circumstances, and those that feared the consequences of opposing Machado, did not attack his regime or United States' economic penetration. The violence loosened by the agents of Machado against the upper and middle class group that opposed him, further convinced those sectors reluctant to join the opposition of the wisdom of their position.⁵⁰

The Students

When Machado came to power he inherited an insulated radical fringe of students and a relatively peaceful campus. The President did not run into trouble with the majority of student opinion until 1927-1928, when he engineered the irregular extension of his mandate. In response to

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 76.

⁴⁸The program of the ABC can be found in Carlos Rivera, **Machado: Crímenes y horrores de un régimen**, Havana, Cuba, 1942.

⁴⁹José Álvarez Díaz, **Cuba: geopolítica y pensamiento económico**, Miami, Univ. of Miami Press, 1964, p. 403.

⁵⁰Benjamin, "The Machadato", p. 80.

⁴⁴See table on note 18; Domínguez, **Cuba: Order and Revolution**, p. 27.

⁴⁵Charles Page, **The Development of Organized Labor in Cuba**, Dissertation University of California, Berkeley, 1952, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁶Benjamin, "The Machadato", p. 72.

this political maneuver, the students carried out a series of anti-Machado demonstrations, to which the President responded by dissolving the FEU, and by closing the University temporarily.⁵¹

Militants among the student body at the University responded to those actions by creating a new student organization, the **Directorio Estudiantil Universitario** (DEU) which issued a manifesto attacking the regime. The group was expelled from the University, but it continued to meet informally and to maintain contacts with the student body. In 1929, student leader, Julio A. Mella was assassinated. The students held Machado responsible for the murder and many slowly began to support the militant position. To try to co-opt the student body, in 1930 the government allowed the re-establishment of the Directorio Estudiantil at the University. This tactic backfired. The Directorio, which now counted with a much larger following, decided to carry out a massive anti-Machado demonstration. It ended in a confrontation with the police and in the death of one of the leaders. Machado responded by declaring that the University was full of communists and by closing the institution. Student opposition then spread beyond the University and Machado was forced to close most of the high schools as well.⁵²

By this time, the situation had acquired a momentum of its own, and many middle class opponents of the regime began to support the students. The Directorio published a new program which came to constitute a focal expression of militant anti-Machado Cuban nationalism. This program called for political change as a precondition to university reform and the signatories pledged to fight for "a deep social transformation."⁵³ The goals defended by the students turned out to be basically those proposed by the ABC. They thus adopted a nationalism similar to that defended by the middle class to which many of them belonged. The students differed from the latter in only one matter: they wanted to extend political franchise to everybody, not to limit it to a small group. This issue didn't preclude an alliance between both groups. Many students joined with the middle class professionals to carry out urban guerrilla warfare against the police apparatus of the regime.

In January 1931, most of the Directorio leadership was arrested. While in prison, an ideological split developed among its leaders. As a result, a group with Marxist tendencies founded the Ala Izquierda Estudiantil. This group moved toward the position of the Cuban Communist Party.⁵⁴ Their nationalism was more radical and anti-American than that defended by the more moderate student groups. The extraordinary events that took place during Machado's regime, then, had the consequence of making the previously peaceful students, whose main concern had been to obtain academic reforms, adopt an anti-government and anti-American stance. The crisis aroused in them nationalist feelings which previously did not exist.

⁵¹Eduardo Suárez Rivas, *Un pueblo crucificado*, Miami, Florida, 1969, p. 21. Roa, *Retorno a la alborada*, pp. 251-255; Suchlicki, *University Students and Revolution in Cuba, 1920-1968*, pp. 22-24; Aguilar, *Cuba*, pp. 76-77.

⁵²Suchlicki, *University Students and Revolution in Cuba*, pp. 25-26; Aguilar, *Cuba* pp. 102-103.

⁵³The program of the Directorio Estudiantil Universitario appears in José Duarte Oropesa, *Historiología cubana*, Hollywood, California, 1969, vol. V, pp. 332-335.

⁵⁴Aguilar, *Cuba*, pp. 116-117; Suchlicki, *University Students and Revolution*, p. 28. The program can be found in "Manifiesto del Ala Izquierda Estudiantil", *Pensamiento Crítico*, No. 38, April 1970, pp. 123-129.

Epilogue

By 1933 all these groups had united with other sectors of Cuban society (the intellectuals, a number of politicians, and some sectors of the Army that had come to think that the fall of Machado was inevitable) to attack the dictator. Under the major themes of anti-dictatorship and anti-imperialism, the movement against him came to encompass the majority of the population. The decisive blow came when, by the end of May 1933, the United States recognized that Machado did not have any popular backing and decided to stop supporting him. On August 12, Machado's government was finally ousted.

With the dictator out, the opportunity of putting into practice the nationalist reforms preached by different groups seemed to have come. However, these goals were not achieved and the revolution failed. Two reasons explain this failure. After the revolutionaries rose to power, divisions began to appear among them: they could not agree upon the type of society they wanted to create. As important as this factor, was the fact that the United States intervened and helped to re-establish a conservative regime. Although much of the responsibility for the failure of the Revolution belonged to the Cubans themselves, America played a significant role in its defeat. Many Cubans would not forget this fact. The result of that intervention was to further fuel the anti-American nationalism that prior to 1924, practically didn't exist in the sectors studied. The United States was to pay the consequences of the short-sightedness it showed during these years when in 1959, Fidel Castro came to power.

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