

# Initiation of Revolution : The Significance of September 30, 1930 in Cuba

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The revolution of the thirties was the most pronounced political event in the history of republican Cuba. This revolution, although not as well known as the more famous revolution led by Fidel Castro several decades later, produced significant changes to republican Cuba's political structure born in the aftermath of the wars for independence from Spain in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the United States military occupation of, and political interference in, the island republic early in the twentieth century. The revolution of the thirties, which can be roughly dated from the university students' demonstration of September 1930 to the crushing of the general strike of March 1935, resulted in the replacement of the republic's political class made up of the independence generation, i.e., politicians who derived their political legitimacy from their participation in the wars for independence, to a new generation from the professional classes, including professors and students from the University of Havana, and the enlisted men of the lower ranks of the military. Members of both social sectors played prominent roles in the unfolding of the revolutionary events of the first half of the decade of the 1930s.

The old political parties were swept away by the revolutionary tide in the first half of the decade of the thirties and replaced with new political parties, with nicknames such as "authentic" and "orthodox," the leaders of which derived political legitimacy from their participation in the revolution. The four most prominent politicians in Cuba from the mid-1930s until the triumph in 1959 of what would become the socialist revolution were : two ex-students of the University of Havana,

Carlos Prío Socarrás (President of Cuba from 1948-1952) and Eduardo Chibás (the founder and leader of the progressive and main oppositional political party), an ex-professor of the same university, Ramón Grau San Martín (leader of the revolutionary government in the autumn of 1933 and later President of Cuba from 1944-1948) and an ex-sergeant of the Cuban military, Fulgencio Batista (“strong man” of Cuba in the latter half of the 1930s, President of Cuba from 1940-1944, and dictator of the republic from the coup d’état of March 10, 1953 until being overthrown himself on the first of January, 1959. This is not to deny the active participation of other sectors of Cuban society, especially the laboring classes, in the revolution of the thirties, but the influence of the middle sectors of society on the subsequent history of the Cuban republican era was predominant.

At the end of the third decade of the twentieth century, Cuba was not only suffering from the social changes that had emerged after formal independence, but also from economic collapse and a strain on the political system of the republic. The stock market crash in the United States had an immediate and severe impact on the Cuban economy. Not only did workers suffer from significant job losses, full time employment became part time work for many. By the early 1930s, lower and middle level civil servants were not being paid their full salaries and their remuneration was several months in arrears. Small and medium sized businesses were drastically affected by the dropping demand for goods from consumers without the wherewithal to purchase articles for sale at rates prior to the economic collapse. Of course, agricultural laborers and small farmers were also hit hard.

At the same time, the president of Cuba, Gerardo Machado Morales, had completely upset the formal understanding among Cuba’s political oligarchs and had shown clearly his dictatorial tendencies, first by prolonging his term of office by two years, and then by insuring his own reelection for a new and lengthened term of six years. Moreover, by maneuvering the three main political parties to support his “unitary candidacy,” opposition could no longer be expressed through the legal political system.

The revolution against this creeping dictatorship of President Machado began in earnest in the autumn of 1930. The event that began this struggle was a demonstration led by students of the University of Havana. The demonstration was attacked by the authorities and resulted in the death of the student Rafael Trejo. The repercussions from Trejo's martyrdom were felt throughout the island and almost succeeded in toppling the regime. From the day of the university students' demonstration on September 30, 1930, until Gerardo Machado fled the island on August 12, 1933, a relentless campaign of protests, impromptu demonstrations, bombings, political killings, and rebellions against him was unleashed not only by the students, but also by various sectors of the population. Still, Cuba's revolution of the 1930s was sparked by an act of the university student movement. The preparation of this act, the demonstration itself and its immediate effects, is the subject of this paper.

## **The Students Reorganize**

The student demonstration of September 30, 1930 did not emanate out of thin air. The groundwork for the reactivation of student interest and activity in the politics of the country began a year earlier. The University of Havana in 1929 was quiet after the expulsions of activist students in the previous two school years. The repressive apparatus created in reply to the student movement against Machado's prolongation of his presidential term of office and his subsequent unopposed reelection remained operative. The university's disciplinary councils continued to expel students who dared to engage in protesting the government or participate in any other political activity. The police and military were stationed on campus to maintain order and to prevent the outbreak of political disturbances. Even the secondary schools throughout the country were militarized for similar purposes. The *Federación Estudiantil Universitaria* (FEU ; University Student Federation) remained banned and the only student associations allowed were those devoted to

academic, cultural and athletic pursuits. On the university campus, the prevalent attitude was one of acquiescence. The rector of the university was a firm Machadista. Even the professorate had been cowed into silence. Only one professor had voted against granting Machado the honorary academic title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* although the president was not known for his intellect. The degree was granted, though, before the student protests of 1927. Under this atmosphere of repression and intimidation, an apolitical attitude prevailed among most of the student body.<sup>1)</sup>

Under the initiative of Aureliano Sánchez Arango, who had been a member of the university student leadership group, the *Directorio* of 1927 and subsequently an expelled student, a small group of university students banded together to attempt to reactivate the student movement. Their first meeting was held in November 1929. Present at that meeting were Juan Ramón Breá, Carlos Prío Socarrás, Ramón Miyar Millán, José Antonio Guerra, Virgilio Ferrer Gutiérrez, Raúl Roa García, Rafael Rubio Padilla and, of course, Sánchez Arango.<sup>2)</sup> Under Sánchez Arango's leadership, the group adopted a plan of action that consisted of initiating clandestine propaganda primarily focused on problems at the university and then linking those problems to broader social and political concerns. At that time, Sánchez Arango was personally close to the well-known writer Rubén Martínez Villena, the leader of the Cuban Communist Party, and his political views were not only anti-Machado, but also anti-imperialist. Another leftist of the group, Raúl Roa, had given a lecture on October 31 at a conference given by *La Asociación de Estudiantes de la Facultad de Derecho* (the Association of Students of the Law Faculty) on the political and social activity of the Argentine José Ingenieros.<sup>3)</sup> Although the conference was permitted under auspices of being a cultural activity, Roa, in his lecture, expounded anti-imperialist views, made statements in favor of university reform and the Russian Revolution, and made veiled criticisms of Machado. His talk was well received by the audience of students, but the university authorities severely frowned upon the affair.<sup>4)</sup>

Although Sánchez Arango's group was formed to activate a student movement

along anti-government lines, the initial thrust of its work would be oriented only toward university demands. These demands were declared in a manifesto clandestinely distributed in December. They were : 1) the return of the expelled students ; 2) the formation of a student federation ; and 3) the implementation of university reform and university autonomy. In spite of these university-oriented demands, the real objective of the group was to come out openly against the government eventually. The strategy was simply stated by Roa, "*Había que hacerle ver al estudiantado, cómo, sin una previa transformación histórica, aquella [cuestión académica] no tenía solución verdadera.*"<sup>5)</sup>

The first action of the group centered on the commemorative events of November 27, the date of the martyrdom of the anti-colonial university students in the nineteenth century. In contact with the *Comité Universitario 27 de Noviembre* (November 27 University Committee), the group recruited Rafael Trejo González, a member of the committee. They managed to distribute their illegal manifesto both during the daytime ceremony at the cemetery and in the evening at the university auditorium, where they were able to cut the lights and throw copies of their manifesto from the balcony to the audience below. The ensuing ruckus put the university authorities into a frenzy over this disruption.

The next major event at the University of Havana was the convening of the International Congress of Universities, the inaugural session of which was to be held on February 15, 1930. Some time prior to this international congress, Machado attempted to improve the image of the University of Havana by first withdrawing the military from the campus. This move had given those in the activist student group a little space to pursue their preparations. Furthermore, the governmental authorities decided on an amnesty for the students who had been expelled for political activities in 1927-1928. The amnesty was officially decided by the university faculty and the rector of the university, Octavio Averhoff, announced that it would be given to any student who requested it. The student associations in a collective letter to the faculty dated February 5, 1930, asked for a general amnesty for the expelled students.

But the affected students, the most prominent of which were in exile, rejected the proffered amnesty. The activist group at the university also opposed the amnesty arguing instead in favor of a full rehabilitation of the expelled students without compromises or restrictions.<sup>6)</sup> Although the congress was held without incident and Machado was able to savor a celebration in homage to himself at the university, only a few students attended the initial session and the activist group was able to mail to each of the foreign delegates a copy of its sixth numbered manifesto, describing its critique of the situation at the university and in the political life of the country.

Because of the activities described above, the group began to increase in numbers and following. Its prestige and support among the student body increased considerably in the spring of 1930.<sup>7)</sup> Even some prominent students, such as the president of the association of law students, Luis Botifoll, joined the group.<sup>8)</sup> Concomitant with this trend, the leader of the group, Sánchez Arango, found it necessary to go into exile in March due to the increasing harassment of its members by the university administration and governmental authorities. That month saw a fervent increase in student activity. Thousands of leaflets and student proclamations were distributed on and off campus. Classrooms were turned into arenas of passionate speeches and vibrant debates. Several meetings and protests were held in the university's main square called the *Patio de los Laureles*.

One major action of student defiance of the regime was the destruction of a billboard with Machado's name on it at the law school. Most public works projects had a billboard mentioning Machado as president at the time of construction and this particular billboard placed next to a school building was especially offensive to the students. They considered it an insult to student dignity. The billboard was destroyed in secret, but it soon was widely known among the students who the responsible party was. Five students participated in tearing down and burning the billboard, including Luis Botifoll and Rafael Trejo. This act alone considerably raised the prestige of the group.<sup>9)</sup> Even the new rector protected the students. In February, Dr. Clemente Inclán had replaced Averhoff who had been appointed to

Machado's cabinet. Although in full knowledge of the incident, Dr. Inclán denied to the investigating judge any student participation in the act.<sup>10)</sup> A similar act of billboard destruction on the university campus in 1927 by activist students had signified a political protest against the government. For the younger students, this renewed destruction represented a symbolic link with their elder mentors.

The group now felt confident enough to participate in the elections of the association of law students. The group's confidence was justified since its members swept the elections. After the elections, the association was essentially under the activists' control.<sup>11)</sup> Rafael Trejo and Carlos Prío, both members of the group, became the association's vice-president and secretary, respectively. The original plan of the group was to use the association as a vehicle to raise the level of student protest in the fall.

The association's elections culminated the group's activities for the 1929-1930 school year. Final exams were approaching and summer vacation was to follow. The group had been fairly successful in attracting the support of the students, but now, as in the past, the school's summer break halted student mobilization activities. The start of the new school year in the fall would see its recommencement.

## **The September 30 Demonstration**

University students began to organize in early September 1930 for a demonstration. In August, an interview with Enrique José Varona had been published in which the Cuban philosopher decried the moral, social and political conditions of the country. His pessimistic view included some harsh words concerning Cuba's youth :

*Individualmente, hay jóvenes de gran talento y cultura, algunos de carácter, pocos de alma ciudadana y espíritu público, pero en conjunto, la [juventud] que yo contemplo, no conozco la del interior; rinde culto fervoroso a los sports ; se entusiasma con...los triunfos de un team de fútbol... Yo quisiera ver a la juventud gallarda, cívica, combatiente, preparada, culta,*

*capaz de enfrentarse con los problemas de hoy y encararse al futuro...  
Quisiera verlos, como aquellos pocos jóvenes universitarios protestando  
contra la Reforma Constitucional y la Prórroga de Poderes y las libertades  
conculcadas, sacrificándose por el ideal. Un pueblo no se redime más  
que cuando tiene conductores con espíritu de sacrificio...<sup>12)</sup>*

Varona was directly challenging the students to act as the expelled students had acted against the regime in power. Many students were moved to respond with deeds to the words of *el Maestro*. More and more continued to join the group that now operated out of the student association of the law faculty.

Machado, attempting to avoid a disagreeable occurrence at the university prior to the holding of partial elections in November, decided to postpone the opening of the new school year. The interim rector, Ricardo Martínez Prieto, consented, and a decree was issued to that effect. Dr. Inclán, the rector of the university, was out of the country. The postponement of classes only angered the students more. It should be noted that participation in the partial elections was limited to members of the three official parties (no other political party was legally allowed), and all three parties supported the Machado administration. Spurred by the call of Varona, the students felt that they had to openly confront and oppose the criminal and illegal regime of Machado. On September 21, at a student meeting on the farm of Augusto Valdés Miranda's family, the following activities were agreed to: 1) to conduct a student assembly at the university to denounce the rector's decree, criticize the social and economic situation of the country and demand the immediate resignation of Machado; 2) to march to Varona's home at the conclusion of the student assembly; 3) to establish a solidarity link with the activist students of 1927; and 4) to contact anti-Machado professors.<sup>13)</sup> After being informed of the plan, Varona agreed enthusiastically.

A small committee was formed to write a leaflet to be distributed at the student assembly, but their draft did not meet with the approval of the group. Subsequently, Roa wrote another that was acceptable. He was undoubtedly one of the ablest

writers of what was to be called the Generation of the 1930s. In a meeting on September 28, Prío and Roa proposed the formation of a vanguard group that would lead and coordinate the revolutionary student movement against the regime. Considerable opposition had been raised to the idea in previous meetings. Although the activists were united in their opposition to Machado, there was a variety of political opinion in the group. This would lead to a split in the leadership of the university students within half a year. Also, some were opposed to designating themselves leaders of the university students. For them, the reestablishment of a student federation at the university with a proper election of its leadership was preferable. Barring this possibility, which Machado would not allow, the student assembly called for September 30 could decide on leaders, giving them more legitimacy than self-appointed ones. Under the prevailing repression, these arguments were considered unrealistic. Some of the group, priding themselves on being “*hombres de acción*,” were not interested in forming formal political or leadership organizations.<sup>14</sup> In the end, a leadership group was deemed necessary for the success of the protest. The *Directorio Estudiantil Universitario* (DEU ; University Student Directory) of 1930 was formed and its members, representing each of the university’s academic faculties, were appointed.<sup>15</sup> The establishment of a *Directorio* also gave these new student activists a symbolic link with the students of 1927 who had themselves constituted a *Directorio* to lead the students’ fight against Machado’s constitutional changes.

On Monday, September 29, the day prior to the demonstration, in the room of the association of law students, Prío and Trejo joked in an unknowingly prophetic and tragic manner. Trejo began, “*Aquí hace falta una víctima y yo creo que debe ser alguno significado, como Prío, como Roa...*” (“We need a victim here and I think it should be someone prominent, like Prío, like Roa...”) Prío responded, “*¡Tú eres bobo! A mí no me gusta el papel de muerto, ¿por qué no lo desempeñas tú?*” (“You’re crazy! I do not like the role of a dead man. Why don’t you play the part yourself?”) In fact, Trejo would assume the role of martyr. Suddenly, someone

arrived yelling that the police were on their way. Most of those present fled, while Prío and Roa pretended to play a round of table tennis. In the end it was a false alarm.<sup>16)</sup> The following day would not be one.

On that fateful day, problems immediately began to occur as the students prepared for the planned activities. Although the rector had personally warned some students earlier in the month that he would call the authorities if they tried to make political speeches and disrupt order, many were surprised when they found the university effectively closed off. The police, both on foot and horseback, were all over the campus. Leading the force was the hated police inspector Antonio B. Ainciart. The military was on alert and encampments were placed at strategic points near the university. Access to the *Patio de los Laureles*, where the students were to meet, was completely blocked.<sup>17)</sup> It is probable that the authorities had been informed about the plans of the DEU by a student participant in the preparatory meetings, José Soler Lezama, who had also been close to the *Directorio* of 1927.<sup>18)</sup> The DEU remained unaware of his spying for the authorities until after the fall of Machado.

Unable to gain access to the university, the students assembled at Eloy Alfaro Park. Now numbering about a hundred, they decided to begin a march directly toward the presidential palace, instead of Varona's home, to present a demand for Machado's resignation in person. As the demonstrators marched, they chanted “¡Mue-  
ra Machado!” “¡Abajo la tiranía!” (“Death to Machado!” “Down with the  
tyranny!”) and unfolded a large Cuban flag. They were attacked in the middle of  
their line and cut in two by the police wielding clubs. Some demonstrators  
responded with their fists, while others threw stones at the attackers. Trejo was in a  
fight with constable Felix Robaina when Antonio Díaz Baldoquín came to help.  
The latter attempted to disarm the policeman whose gun was exposed, but a shot  
rang out. Trejo fell to the ground and was soon covered with blood. By the  
following day he was dead. Another participant, Pablo de la Torriente Brau, was  
pummeled and lost consciousness with a profusion of blood flowing from his head.

There were more hurt with bullet wounds and several were arrested. The demonstrators, unable to proceed to their intended destination, dispersed among the side streets.

## **Aftermath of the Demonstration**

The martyrdom of the student Rafael Trejo shook the island to its roots. His funeral became a public manifestation of repudiation to the regime.<sup>19)</sup> Denunciations of the police and the authorities came from all sectors of Cuban society. Protests and demonstrations occurred from the westernmost province of Pinar del Río to the easternmost province of Oriente during the next two months. The *Instituto de Santiago* suspended classes in October because of student disturbances in that city.<sup>20)</sup> Newspapers became emboldened to openly criticize the administration and publish oppositionist tracts. Conspiracies and maneuvers to change the government arose, even among the traditional oligarchs. The student demonstration had awakened the nation from its lethargy. The Machado regime, for the first time since 1925, appeared to be politically weak and ready to fall. The DEU was suddenly a major political force in the island.

The manifesto written by Roa that was to be distributed on the university campus and which eventually littered the streets of Havana on September 30 openly called for the resignation of President Machado. The primary aim of the students, as explicitly stated, was to assist in the overthrow of the Machado dictatorship. In the document, the students identified closely with the judgment of Varona that Cuba was living its bleakest times. Responding to Varona's challenge of the previous month, the students affirmed that powerful forces had made Cuba's youth appear indifferent to the nation's plight. Moreover, not only had they always maintained solidarity with the expelled students of 1927-1928 and struggled for their reinstatement, but now the students would continue their "pure" struggle for societal reform and were ready for any sacrifice. After criticizing Machado's political practices and his

handling of the financial affairs of the government, the document also criticized the university professors, with certain “valiant” exceptions, for their acquiescence to the tyranny of the regime. The manifesto accused the professorate as a whole of being the intellectual support of the dictatorship. The professors had supported Machado’s constitutional reforms, made public pronouncements of support for him, expelled students for engaging in political protest, and watched in silence the military occupation of the university. Furthermore, the *Consejo Universitario* and the interim rector, as tools of the regime and for purely political purposes, had postponed the opening of school until after the farcical elections of November 1. The manifesto ended with a call for the renunciation of Machado as the solution to the Cuban problem.<sup>21)</sup> Although written by Roa, the document did not reflect his leftist views, which posited Cuban problems in the nation’s social structure and the predominance of the imperialism of the United States in Cuban political and economic affairs. For Roa and the leftist minority of the DEU, the Machado regime was a symptom of more fundamental social and class problems in an imperialist setting, which the removal of Machado by itself would not eliminate. The majority of the DEU were not this advanced in their political views. Their basic view was summed up in the often heard sentence, “*Primero Machado, lo demás después.*”<sup>22)</sup> (“First Machado, later the rest.”) This did not stop Machado from immediately denouncing the DEU as communist and red baiting the organization in an attempt to discredit it in the eyes of the Cuban people.

The DEU responded to these charges by the government in a brief manifesto consisting of three points. First, no political grouping was directing or influencing the decisions of the DEU despite the accusation that communist leaders were inspiring and guiding the new group. Second, professors of the university were not connected with, or advisors to, the DEU. The protest of any professor was considered a civic duty of that individual. The final point announced a university student strike until the suspension of constitutional guarantees that had been imposed in Havana on October 3 was lifted. The DEU called on all the secondary students

in Cuba to follow its example and refrain from attending classes in protest to the murder of Trejo. Unlike the leaflet of the thirtieth, this one carried the names of the members of the DEU.<sup>23)</sup>

On October 23, the DEU issued a “manifesto-program.” Major newspapers prominently printed it in full on the twenty-ninth. Several demands were made that would have to be met before classes could be resumed with the attendance of the students. They were : 1) the dismissal and punishment of those who were responsible for the police attack of September 30 ; 2) the resignation of the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, and former rector of the university, Octavio Averhoff ; 3) the dismissal of the interim rector, Ricardo Martínez Prieto ; 4) the demilitarization of the schools in the republic ; 5) the granting of the right to form a federation of university student associations ; 6) the participation of students in the administration of the university ; 7) the reinstatement of the expelled students of 1927 ; and 8) the granting of university autonomy.<sup>24)</sup>

Although the DEU denounced press censorship, illegal detentions, and the suppression of labor unions, new political parties and student associations, it stepped back from its earlier demand for Machado’s resignation. Indeed, the manifesto-program of the DEU only included essentially university-oriented demands. Although the protest of September 30 had engendered a national opposition of repudiation of the regime, the DEU was reluctant to take the lead of this movement. It also feared losing the support of the university student body by overstepping its leadership role as self-appointed head of the university students to that of leading a national political movement.<sup>25)</sup> Yet, the DEU insisted on the necessity of university students entering the field of politics. After first noting that students in other countries had involved themselves in national political affairs, the DEU maintained that a change in the political and social sphere was necessary for the emergence of the new university :

*No puede existir una nueva Universidad mientras no exista un estado de nuevo tipo distinto en lo fundamental del presente.... [L]uchará el estudiante de Cuba por la honda transformación social que los tiempos*

*piden e imponen. De hoy en lo adelante realizará obra política que, por merecer tal nombre, estará bien lejos de los bajos chalaneos de nuestra farsa electoral.*<sup>26)</sup>

Cuban students had arrived at the crucial change that other contemporary student movements in Latin America had reached. They realized that the goals of university reform, pursued by Cuban students since 1923, could not be implemented solely within the academic field. A necessary social change was a prerequisite for the establishment of the new university.

On November 10, Machado declared a state of war over the whole island and deployed the military into the streets of the cities and towns of Cuba.<sup>27)</sup> The military and students clashed on that day and the following two days. In Havana, a memorial meeting for Rafael Trejo organized and led by women university students could not be held because of police intervention.<sup>28)</sup> Members of the DEU were arrested and detained.<sup>29)</sup> The clashes between the people and the authorities in Santiago de Cuba left one secondary student dead and dozens of demonstrators injured.<sup>30)</sup> Pinar del Río, Santa Clara and other cities saw confrontations between protesters and the military. By the end of November all of Cuba's secondary schools were closed.<sup>31)</sup>

Repression against the student-led demonstrations around the island was not the only tactic used by Machado to pacify the situation and reassert government authority. Averhoff was removed as minister and Carlos Miguel de Céspedes was chosen to replace him. Also, a new rector for the university was named. He was Dr. Luis F. Rodríguez Molina. This latter replacement was intended to be a compromise gesture but was diminished as such since the new rector had presided over the disciplinary tribunal that had expelled the activist students in 1928.<sup>32)</sup> Furthermore, the government attempted to negotiate with the DEU. On November 14, Senator Alberto Barreras and Dr. Lucas Lamadrid opened the way for meetings with the DEU, and on November 17, twelve detained students were released from police custody.<sup>33)</sup> But the DEU was in no mood for negotiations. The government,

in spite of the forcible repression of the opposition, appeared on the brink of collapse. Several prominent newspapers, instead of submitting to censorship, abstained from publication. In October, major newspapers had begun to strongly criticize the government's repressive measures for the first time under Machado's tenure. Refusing to submit to censorship was an act of open defiance of the regime. At least two military conspiracies supported by the opposition against the government were attempted.<sup>34)</sup>

The DEU did not trust in the sincerity of Machado's fig leaf gesture and considered it yet another of his maneuvers to stay in power. In a DEU statement dated November 18, the students declared :

*...se pretende atraernos con inesperadas y halagadores promesas, pero...no son sinceras. Y el Directorio Estudiantil Universitario, esperando mejores tiempos en que la libertad y la justicia resplandezcan en nuestra angustiada patria, resuelve no aceptar ninguna negociación...<sup>35)</sup>*

The DEU, in the same communiqué, reasserted its desire to see an end to the regime in no uncertain terms: "*Pide...un total y definitivo cambio de régimen.*"<sup>36)</sup> Although the rector later made another conciliatory gesture toward the students, that was also rejected by the DEU.<sup>37)</sup> The DEU had returned to its original opposition to Machado of September 30 and, with the broad social and political protest it had provoked, had increased in militancy.

Although constitutional guarantees were reestablished on December 1, Machado removed them once more ten days later. Trouble was brewing again at the university. On December 4, the new rector resigned.<sup>38)</sup> The once submissive faculty of the university rose in opposition to Machado. On December 9, a large group of faculty members, many of whom had supported the regime, decided to back the students' protest. Machado responded by dismissing sixty-six professors, denying access to the university campus for any meetings of whatever nature, closing the university, and withholding faculty salaries. The University of Havana would find itself in a closed or inactive state from December 15, 1930 to January 14,

1934.<sup>39)</sup>

Machado was able to survive the disturbances of the last quarter of 1930, although now he was in a virtual war with not only the opposition, but prominent sectors of Cuban society as well. Bombs, targeted killings, impromptu demonstrations, rebellions, military conspiracies, and urban terrorism became the practice of the opposition. Machado responded with violence of his own : arbitrary arrests, imprisoning, torture, enforced exile, and police murders. Political violence and social misery marked the last years of Machado's presidency.

## **The Political Divide in the Student Movement**

Problems arose within the student opposition movement and the DEU itself. The main debate focused on what should be the prime objective of the movement : opposition to Machado or opposition to United States imperialism. The majority of the student activists were opposed to broadening the struggle against Machado to include anti-imperialism, considering that to be a vague goal which was unrealizable. They thought that adopting an anti-imperialist position would alienate moderate and potential oppositionists. Others thought that a mere substitution of Machado was useless since the political system that had resulted in his presidency would produce another similar president to replace him. For these students, the struggle had to attack the roots of the machadato, i.e., imperialism, even though that meant a long protracted struggle.

This controversy stemmed from debates that had occurred in exile prior to the formation of the DEU. After being exiled from Cuba, Julio Antonio Mella, the most outstanding student leader from the early 1920s, founded the *Asociación de Nuevos Emigrados Revolucionarios Cubanos* (ANERC, Association of New Revolutionary Cuban Emigrés) in Mexico. Though the ANERC was not specifically oriented toward students, several members of the *Directorio* of 1927 joined the organization. The most prominent and influential branches of the ANERC were

located in New York and Paris. The ANERC worked for democratic changes in Cuban politics, but it also assumed a radical anti-imperialist attitude toward the struggle against Machado. It was also anti-capitalist and socialist. A prominent member of the ANERC was Aureliano Sánchez Arango, who was, as noted previously, the prime initiator of what later became the DEU. Eduardo Chibás (a former member of the *Directorio* of 1927), Armando Agramonte and Enrique de la Osa organized in New York in August 1929 the *Unión Cívica de Exiliados Cubanos* (UCEC, Civic Union of Cuban Exiles), a more moderate Cuban exile group than the ANERC. Both Chibás and Sánchez Arango had been jailed in Cuba earlier in the year and had found it necessary to flee the island after being released. The UCEC adopted an anti-Machado stance, but it was not very critical of the dominance of the United States in Cuba's political and economic spheres.<sup>40)</sup> The different approaches to the anti-Machado struggle adopted by these two organizations would be reflected and enhanced within the student movement inside Cuba by the end of 1930.

In December 1930 ANERC sent a letter to the DEU criticizing its *manifiesto-programa* of October.<sup>41)</sup> A meeting was arranged to discuss the differences existing in the midst of the DEU. The meeting was arranged for January 3, 1931, in the home of the journalist Rafael Suárez Solís. For the sympathizers of the anti-imperialist position, some of whom had been instrumental in reactivating the student movement, the position of the DEU had focused too much on replacing Machado by any means, including working with some of the traditional politicians who opposed the regime. For them, it was time to put the DEU on a more revolutionary basis, i.e., anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist, or establish a rival student organization. Moreover, the legitimacy of the DEU could always be questioned since it was the self-appointed leadership of the university students. No student assembly had ever voted confidence in it. With the aim of a rectification or split, Aureliano Sánchez Arango, Raúl Roa, Porfirio Pendás, and Manuel Guillot, members or sympathizers of the ANERC, arrived for the scheduled meeting. The meeting was almost abandoned for the lack of a quorum, but as it was breaking up, three more DEU members

arrived to constitute one.<sup>42)</sup> The meeting began at 4 : 00 pm, but a few minutes later the police raided the premises and jailed everyone they found there. The police had been informed of the meeting probably by José Soler. Only one of the meeting's participants, Juan Antonio Rubia Padilla, successfully eluded capture.<sup>43)</sup> Had the meeting not been interrupted, most probably a split would have been the result, because the majority of the participants did not favor amplifying the struggle against Machado to include opposition to United States imperialism.<sup>44)</sup>

For those students in prison, the differences created no animosity. Indeed, that evening when Sánchez Arango, Pendás, and Guillot, all left-wing students intent on ending their collaboration with the DEU, were removed from the rest of the detained to different quarters, the other imprisoned students began a hunger strike. Immediately, they wrote a manifesto declaring that the DEU and other students would maintain the hunger strike until the safety of their *compañeros* could be assured.<sup>45)</sup>

But amicable relations between the two factions were not maintained outside of prison. In February, under the influence of Chibás, the DEU issued a manifesto proposing a united front of all the oppositionist elements to coordinate the struggle against the dictatorship. The most significant paragraph of the document came as an aside :

*Nota : — El Directorio Estudiantil Universitario, único organismo representativo de la Juventud Estudiantil de la Universidad, condena la actitud de aquellos elementos que inspirados en móviles sectarios o de cualquier otra índole tienden a crear la confusión y el divisionismo en nuestro movimiento, e insiste en la necesidad de mantener la más compacta unión de todos para viabilizar nuestro objetivo. Con este motivo hace un llamamiento a los estudiantes para que no sean sorprendidos en su buena fe por los agentes de la discordia. UNIÓN, es nuestra palabra de orden.*<sup>46)</sup>

The manifesto provoked a strongly-worded attack on the DEU by the newly-

formed Ala Izquierda Estudiantil (AIE, Student Left-wing). The two trends emerged publicly with a vengeance. The AIE accused the DEU of opportunism and of being an instrument of the traditional politicians, like Mario G. Menocal, a Conservative opposition leader and ex-president, and Carlos Mendieta, a Liberal opposition leader and head of the *Unión Nacionalista* (Nationalist Union). The AIE accused the DEU of always opposing the idea of contacts with the workers and peasants and then turning around advocating a united front with all oppositionist elements. But the AIE contended that the workers and peasants could never join a united front with the bourgeoisie or with Cuba's traditional oligarchs, even if some were currently against the Machado regime. The workers and peasants could only work in a united front from below with the petty bourgeoisie and only if those two classes had hegemony in the front at that. For the AIE, the DEU was mistaken in not allying fully with the workers and peasants and in not placing the student movement under their direction. Finally, the crux of the problem lay in the DEU's failure to become an anti-imperialist organization.<sup>47)</sup> It is significant that the AIE's manifesto was addressed not only to the students but to the working class as well.

This *manifesto-programa* announced the establishment of the AIE as a revolutionary organization of students with direct ties to the *Directorio* of 1927 and the ANERC. About a quarter of the signers of the manifesto had been members of the former.<sup>48)</sup> The AIE declared a four-point program. First, the AIE opposed not only juridical imperialism (a code name for the Platt Amendment which, as the AIE pointed out, even Machado nominally opposed), but also political and economic imperialism. Second, the AIE recognized the hegemonic position of the proletariat in the struggle against imperialism and capitalism. Third, the AIE reiterated the well-known demands of the university reform movement, adding to them the need to make contacts with international student congresses to oppose imperialism. Fourth, the AIE advocated student links to the proletariat through night schools and *universidades populares* (people's universities).<sup>49)</sup>

In time, differences in the means by which to overthrow Machado arose

between the two student groups. The DEU, realizing that organizing marches to protest the dictatorship was impossible in the increasingly repressive atmosphere, opted for urban terrorism. They organized spontaneous demonstrations (called *tánganas*) in parks, busy street corners and movie theaters. They also engaged in bombings and assassinations of police and other regime officials. The AIE favored agitation against the regime among the working class, building for an eventual general strike to topple Machado.<sup>50</sup> But even within the AIE, some members advocated revolutionary violence. An article entitled, “Tiene la palabra el camarada Mauser” appeared in *Línea*, the official publication of the AIE, calling on the students to take up arms against the regime. The article appeared just a month prior to a revolt headed by the traditional politicians of whom the AIE was so critical. The article provoked a polemic within the organization, which later evolved into a split, because its approach to combating Machado was viewed as adventurist and not adhering to the proletarian line. In the end, both tactics of struggle, urban terrorism and the general strike, helped lead to the overthrow of Machado.

The immediate goals of the September 30 demonstration were not achieved. The students were unable to access the university campus. Neither Varona’s domicile nor the presidential palace, intended destinations for the demonstration, was reached. But, the activists succeeded to an extent they had not imagined. Not only were they finally able to reactivate the student movement and direct it in a political direction, but they awakened Cuban society to its lethargy toward the unfolding dictatorship of Gerardo Machado. The regime suffered a tremendous blow from October to December, 1930 and was almost toppled from power by the riots, disturbances, and conspiracies aimed against it and by the general repudiation of Machado by Cuban society. Although taken aback by its success and initially reluctant to take the lead of this unprecedented situation, the DEU had become a major player in the politics of the nation. Even though Machado survived in power for another two and a half years, the DEU only increased in prestige during the revolution against him. That revolution began in earnest with the demonstration led by university students at the

end of September 1930.

#### Notes

- 1) Raúl Roa, *La jornada revolucionaria del 30 de septiembre* (La Habana : Cultural, 1934), pg. 12.
- 2) *Ibid.*, pg. 11.
- 3) His lecture is printed in full in Raúl Roa, *Bufo subversiva* (La Habana : Cultural, 1935), pp. 13-34.
- 4) Lionel Soto, *La revolución del 33*, 3 vols., (La Habana : Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1977), vol. 2, pp. 26-27.
- 5) "We had to make the student body see, how, without a prior historic transformation, that university problem had no true solution." Roa, *La jornada revolucionaria del 30 de septiembre*, pg. 26.
- 6) Soto, *op. cit.*, pg. 28.
- 7) Roa, *op. cit.*, pg. 32.
- 8) Soto, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.
- 9) Raúl Roa, *La revolución del 30 se fue a bolina* (La Habana : Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1976), pp. 227-28.
- 10) *Ibid.*, pg. 228.
- 11) *Ibid.*, pg. 229.
- 12) "Individually, there are young people of great talent and culture, some of character, a few of civic responsibility and public spirit, but in general the youth that I am aware of, I do not know those of the interior [of the country], get excited with the triumphs of a soccer team.... I would like to see young people that are gallant, civic minded, combative, prepared, cultured, and capable of confronting the problems of today and facing the future.... I would like to see them like those few university youths who protested against the constitutional reform and the prolongation of terms of political office and the trampled freedoms, sacrificing themselves for an ideal. A nation does not redeem itself more than when it has conductors with a spirit of sacrifice." Hortensia Pichardo Viñals, *Documentos para la historia de Cuba*, 4 vols. (La Habana : Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1969-1980), vol. 3, pg. 446.
- 13) Roa, *La jornada revolucionaria del 30 de septiembre*, pp. 41-42.
- 14) Roa, *Bufo subversiva*, pg. 89.
- 15) The founding members of the new *Directorio* were: Carlos Prío Socarrás, Alberto Espinosa, Justo Carrillo Hernández, Augusto Valdés Miranda García, Virgilio Ferrer Gutiérrez, Manuel Antonio de Varona Loredó, Raúl Roa García, Rubén León García, José Leyva Gordil, Carlos Guerrero Costales, José Ramón Blanco, Fernando López Fernández, Jaime Urquí, L. López Luis, Ramón Miyar Millán, Carlos Sardiñas, Carlos Fuertes Blandino, and José Antonio Viego Delgado.
- 16) Roa, *La revolución del 30 se fue a bolina*, pg. 233.
- 17) *Ibid.*, pg. 234; and Pablo de la Torre Brau, *Pluma en ristre* (La Habana : Publicaciones del Ministerio de Educación, Dirección de Cultura, 1949), pg. 112.
- 18) Luis E. Aguilar, *Cuba 1933 : Prologue to Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1972), pg. 102.

- 19) José A. Tabares del Real, *La revolución del 30 : sus dos últimos años* (La Habana : Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1971), pg. 123.
- 20) Carlos G. Peraza, *Machado : crímenes y horrores de un régimen* (La Habana : Cultural, 1933), pg. 72.
- 21) “Manifiesto de los estudiantes universitarios al pueblo de Cuba” (September 30, 1930), in Pichardo, *op. cit.*, pp. 449-51.
- 22) Ladislao González Carbajal, *El Ala Izquierda Estudiantil y su época* (La Habana : Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1974), pg. 57.
- 23) Directorio Estudiantil Universitario, “Al pueblo de Cuba” (n.d.), Olga Cabrera and Carmen Almodóbar, comps., *Las luchas estudiantiles universitarias, 1923-1934* (La Habana : Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), pg. 277.
- 24) Directorio Estudiantil Universitario, “Manifiesto-programa al pueblo de Cuba” (October 23, 1930), in Pichardo, *op. cit.*, pp. 458-60.
- 25) Justo Carrillo, *Cuba 1933 : estudiantes, yanquis y soldados* (Miami, Fla. : Instituto de Estudios Interamericanos, University of Miami, 1985), pg. 25.
- 26) “A new university cannot exist as long as a new type of state fundamentally different from the present does not exist.... The students of Cuba will fight for the profound social transformation that the present time demands and imposes upon us. From today on, they will participate in politics that although termed as such, will be very different from the low huckstering of our electoral farce.” Pichardo, *loc. cit.*
- 27) Soto, *op. cit.*, pg. 46.
- 28) Details of the attempted memorial for Trejo can be found in an article entitled, “Las mujeres contra Machado,” originally published years later in the magazine *Bohemia* and reprinted in Torriente Brau, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-106.
- 29) Directorio Estudiantil Universitario, “Acuerdo” (November 18, 1930), Cabrera and Almodóbar, *op. cit.*, pg. 274.
- 30) Soto, *loc. cit.*
- 31) Aguilar, *loc. cit.*
- 32) Soto, *op. cit.*, pg. 47.
- 33) Peraza, *op. cit.*, pg. 80.
- 34) Tabares del Real, *loc. cit.*
- 35) “...an attempt is made to lure us with unexpected and flattering promises but...they are not sincere. And the University Student Directory, waiting for better times when freedom and justice shine throughout our anguished country, determine not to accept any negotiations...” Directorio Estudiantil Universitario, “Acuerdo” (November 18, 1930), Cabrera and Almodóbar, *op. cit.*, pp. 275-76.
- 36) “[The DEU] demands a total and definite change of regime.” *Ibid.*, pg. 276.
- 37) Peraza, *op. cit.*, pg. 81.
- 38) *Ibid.*
- 39) Soto, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.
- 40) *Ibid.*, pg. 26.
- 41) *Ibid.*, pg. 53.
- 42) Torriente Brau, *op. cit.*, pg. 5.
- 43) *Ibid.*, pg. 8.
- 44) *Ibid.*, pg. 5.

- 45) *Ibid.*, pg. 11.
- 46) “The University Student Directory, the only representative organization of the student youth of the university, condemns the position of those elements, inspired by sectarian motives or other such inclinations, which tend to create confusion and division in our movement, and insists on the necessity of maintaining the tightest unity of all for realizing our objective. With this motive, it [the DEU] calls on students not to be surprised in their good faith by the agents of discord. UNITY [emphasis in the original] is our operative word.” Directorio Estudiantil Universitario, “Al pueblo de Cuba,” (February 3, 1931), Cabrera and Almodóbar, *op. cit.*, pp. 280-81.
- 47) Ala Izquierda Estudiantil, “A los estudiantes y a la clase trabajadora de Cuba” (February, 1931), in Pichardo, *op. cit.*, pp. 487-93.
- 48) González Carbajal, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.
- 49) Ala Izquierda Estudiantil, “A los estudiantes y a la clase trabajadora de Cuba” (February, 1931), Pichardo, *op. cit.*, pp. 492-93.
- 50) González Carbajal, *op. cit.*, pg. 62.