

Continuing Revolution

As the 1930's progressed, the opposition grew bolder under the care and support of US Ambassador Sumner Welles and Machado. The Ambassador made frequent requests to the US Secretary of State asking for direct US military intervention, met with Machado's opponents, and stalled any meaningful reform of Cuban trade with the United States. Cuban Ambassador Oscar Cintas visited American government officials in Washington, DC and complained that Sumner Welles was refusing to negotiate a new commercial treaty with Cuba and that this was exacerbating Cuba's economic downturn for the sole purpose of forcing his demand that Machado leave.¹ Machado considered mounting a military counter-offensive with the significant military backing he still possessed,² but decided not to in part because he did not wish to see Cuba invaded again by the United States.

The situation reached a climax in early August 1933, when Havana bus drivers went on strike because the government allegedly forced them to buy gas from one of Machado's businesses. This story may be false, however, because neither Machado nor his family owned any businesses related to gas or petroleum products³ but the effect was contagious none the less. This strike spread throughout the city, and then to the rest of the island, shutting down schools and many businesses. Welles reported that "the government is bankrupt and government employees are practically starving

¹ William Phillips, Under-Secretary of State, Memorandum of Conversation with the Cuban Ambassador, August 2, 1933, Washington, LC 837.00/3635.

² Special Collection, Machado, XVIII-6, Machado still had the Havana Fortress, cavalry arriving from Matanzas and Piñar del Rio, the Presidential Guard headquartered at Atares Castle, and the Havana Police. These forces were available almost immediately in Havana, and do not include loyal forces elsewhere.

³ Maria Grau Machado de Santeiro. Interviewed in her home in Miami, Florida on November 11, 1997.

as a result of non-payment of salaries for months past.”⁴ The Cuban officer corps, increasingly frustrated with Machado’s weakened position, and fearful for its own well-being should the United States intervene, told Machado that he had to go.⁵

Ambassador Welles pressed hard for Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the Cuban Ambassador in Mexico, to take over, but temporarily acceded to an agreement to allow the Secretary of War, General Alberto Herrera to step in. Céspedes was not part of Machado’s inner circle, and surrendering the government to him, no matter how acceptable to the opposition, would be a loss of face for Machado. The additional benefit of turning the government over to Herrera was to placate an already very uneasy military who were beginning to ponder their own fate in the revolutionary environment. Machado resigned and General Herrera took over. Then Herrera resigned within a few hours and Céspedes was administered the oath of office as the President of Cuba.⁶ Machado left the presidential palace at 9:30 AM while thousands of people lined the streets silently watching the procession. Large groups of ABC members gathered under the balconies of the United States Embassy. As soon as Machado left the scene, the ABC began stirring up the crowds. ABC members hoisted the red flag of their society from the US embassy shouting "Down with Machado," "Long live the Revolution," and "Long live the ABC." Sumner Welles reported the presence of “communists manifestations,”⁷ and roving crowds sacked

⁴ Sumner Welles to Secretary of State, August 13, 1933, Havana, 837.00/3646.

⁵ Louis Pérez, Cuba Under the Platt Amendment: 1902-1934, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), 316. Hereafter cited as Pérez, Cuba Under the Platt Amendment.

⁶ Welles to Secretary of State, August 13, 1933, Havana, 837.00/3649.

⁷ Welles to Secretary of State, August 4, 1933, Havana, 837.00/3635.

the presidential palace.⁸ Welles reported that “crowds have broken into houses of many members of the former government and have sacked them.”⁹

Céspedes was sworn in while the ABC hunted down and murdered their enemies and began burning many buildings in the city. President Céspedes issued orders not to fire against the mob, but short of force, there was little the police could do to stop the rampage. Machado recounted the social aftermath of his departure:

Pillaging and robberies were committed, policemen were assassinated by bricks thrown at them, libraries were burnt, dead bodies, deformed by blows and wounds, were paraded through the streets; the spoils of robberies were called "trophies of war;" men who had never fired a single shot face to face with their enemy called "assassination" "revolutionary justice," and all this was being done with the consent of the United States Ambassador, Mr. Benjamin Sumner Welles, who, four days before, had told me that "his government did not evade responsibilities."¹⁰

Machado, so recently the president of Cuba, now found himself at the mercy of even the lowest government bureaucrats. Machado had arranged a flight out of Cuba, departing at two o'clock in the afternoon. And although the plane had been ready for hours, when the time arrived, the pilot refused to fly him out, saying that the General Staff of the Cuban military had forbidden any planes from leaving without permission.

Meanwhile, the radio stations, controlled by the ABC, were advising "Machadistas" not to leave their homes. Since it was the ABC leading most of the

⁸ Machado Collection, , XVIII-7.

⁹ Welles to Secretary of State, August 12, 1933, Havana, 837.00/3651.

rioting and killing, the radio announcers purported intentions of protecting Machado's supporters appears to have been a ruse, meant actually to aide the tracking down of those men with the intention of killing them. Machado was aware of this, and doubtless the pilot's refusal worried him. Too proud to contact Ambassador Welles to get permission to fly out, one of Machado's associates approached him with a request to intervene. Ambassador Welles complied and responded "Very well, I shall order the pilot to leave."¹¹

Once released to fly out, Machado found himself unable to finance his departure. Machado, two members of his cabinet, the Mayor of Havana, and the chief of the Presidential Escort could not come up with the funds to charter the plane -- less than a thousand dollars. Machado went to a friend to ask for a loan.¹² Finally, with the loan in hand, Machado's group again left for the airfield. On the way they passed some demonstrators who, while cheering the revolution, nevertheless bid them a friendly goodbye. Machado flew to the Bahamas on August 12, 1933.¹³ Taking off under inclement weather, Machado and his companions viewed clouds of black smoke and red spots of fire consuming the homes of Machado supporters as well as other buildings in Havana.

¹⁰ Machado Collection, XVIII-7.

¹¹ Ibid., XVIII-9.

¹² Ibid., XVIII-9.

¹³ Louis A Pérez, Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 264.

Machado lost. Sumner Welles, the student revolutionaries and Carlos Mendieta won. The Cuban people, in the long run, lost; the ensuing chaos prepared the way for Batista, and then for Castro. Machado's remaining six years of life were spent in Canada, the United States, Italy, France, and the Dominican Republic trying to stay one step ahead of assassins and enemies.

Sumner Welles

United States President Roosevelt sent Ambassador Sumner Welles a congratulatory message thanking him "for all he had done" in what at the time appeared to be a successful resolution to the situation in Cuba. Ambassador Welles' goal had been achieved with Machado's departure. He had undermined Machado's government, refused to negotiate any economic stability measures, conspired with Machado's opponents, and asked Roosevelt to intervene with the US military. The net effect of these measures "undermined the basis on which rested the Machado regime with the sole purpose of obtaining his resignation."¹⁴ With Machado gone, Welles requested that he be immediately replaced. The US State Department balked, and Welles was forced to remain in Havana until December 1933. Welles advised Secretary of State Cordell Hull of the circumstances, and requested that Jefferson Caffery replace him no later than September 1.¹⁵

Céspedes

¹⁴ Memorandum, US State Department, December 13, 1933, Washington, 837.00.

¹⁵ Welles to Secretary of State, August 19, 1933, Ibid., 5:367.

Originally hoping the Secretary of War, General Alberto Herrera, would replace Machado, Sumner Welles instead turned to Carlos Manuel de Céspedes when the army opposed Herrera.¹⁶ Céspedes, son of Cuba's president during its rebellion against Spain in the 1860s,¹⁷ annulled Machado's constitutional revisions hoping Cuba would calm down and get about its business. The island did not return to peace -- on the contrary the unrest continued and increased. Ambassador Welles met with "a delegation of thirty of the most prominent businessmen in Cuba" to discuss the unrest. They were "exceedingly concerned by the social and labor unrest" and convinced that "Communist agitators 'under the pay of Russia' " wanted to overthrow the Cuban government and install a Communist regime. Roosevelt announced naval maneuvers around the island in case conditions demanded a military response, but the flotilla did not land any troops or bombard the island.

As with the French and Russian Revolutions, once unleashed the genie of revolution proved impossible to contain. Once tasting victory, students, university professors, labor unions, communists, radicals, and middle class reformers were emboldened in their demands on the government. Céspedes proved unable or unwilling to take the measures necessary to restore civil harmony on the island. Policy changes satisfying one group only angered another. Lacking a substantial political base of his own, Céspedes was unable to force compromise amongst Cuba's feuding factions. The government's only significant backer, the United States, was unwilling to invade the island to keep the government in control. Céspedes' administration relied upon Welles for advice on virtually every issue that came before

¹⁶ Pérez, Cuba Under the Platt Amendment, 317.

¹⁷ Jaime Suchlicki, Cuba: From Columbus to Castro, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 123.

the Cuban government. Too insecure to govern without referring every matter to a foreign official, Céspedes' administration was doomed to an early failure.

The Army

Resentment over the enormous gap in pay and benefits between the officers and the enlisted men had been festering for a long time in Cuba's armed forces. Commissioned officers lived off base in luxury homes, pursuing a life of ease while neglecting their professional duties, while non-commissioned officers remained on base and controlled its day to day operations. The new government, hoping to save money, decided to cut the Army's budget, and the officers promptly decided to pass the burden of the cuts on to the enlisted men. Army noncommissioned officers, without intending to topple the government, plotted to relieve themselves of their superiors with the intent of achieving better living conditions and pay for enlisted soldiers.

Fulgencio Batista joined the army at age 20, seeking to advance himself in one of the few means possible for a youth with a rural impoverished background. Lacking the social background or education to join the officer corps, Batista never the less continued his studies and became a stenographer for the Army.

On September 5, 1933, Sergeant Fulgencio Batista led the revolt against the army officers. When members of the Student Directorate heard rumors of the coup, they convinced Batista to join with them in overthrowing Céspedes, as well as the officers. This conspiracy turned into Cuba's second revolution within a month of the ouster of Machado. Batista informed Céspedes that his services were no longer

desired, forcing Céspedes' resignation. Welles advised Washington that the Cuban Army was in supreme control.¹⁸

The Barracks Revolt elevated Fulgencio Batista to a position of national influence (as both chief of the Army, President of the Republic, and then a former military leader capable of overthrowing the Autentico government in 1952) that would last until Fidel Castro threw him out in 1959. Batista's unconstitutional exercise of power outraged Welles who called vainly for military intervention. Welles then requested troops to guard the Embassy, since there was "no guard anywhere,"¹⁹ and violence was still a problem. Roosevelt refused to allow even this.

Grau San Martin and the Pentarchy

On September 5, 1933 the Céspedes cabinet resigned and Céspedes left the palace for his own home. Immediately thereafter, Welles reports, "a committee of five members of the revolutionary group took possession of the palace as the executive power of the Cuban Republic. Welles reported that "none of the political or independent groups have as yet shown any inclination to support this government" because it was "a group which is solely representative of the student body and extreme radical elements."²⁰ Welles reported that the members of the committee included: "Sergio Carbo, communist; Jose Miguel Irrizarro [Irisarri], a radical of the extreme type who is a law partner of General Menocal's son-in-law; Professors

¹⁸ Memo of Welles/Secretary of State conversation, September 6, 1933, *Ibid.*, 5:389.

¹⁹ Telex from Welles to Secretary of State, September 5, 1933, *Ibid.*, 5:385.

Guillermo Portela and Grau San Martin of the University of Havana, both of whom are extreme radicals; Porfirio Franca, a supposedly conservative business man of good reputation who is being used as window dressing.”²¹ Due to the unpopularity of a “commission” style of government in Havana and presumably in the United States, the Pentarchy quickly adapted a more traditional President and Cabinet format and Grau San Martin was appointed President.

Grau was a well known and widely respected professor of Anatomy at the University of Havana who publicly support student protests against Machado. For this he was jailed by Machado for a short period, and then left the island for Miami where he resided during the early 1930s. Because of his allegiance to the anti-Machado student movement and the great respect he commanded in Cuban society he was recognized as the representative of the DEU, and Welles reported that he was “completely dominated by the students.” The American representative “found him absolutely impractical, without any knowledge of the science of government and vacillating in his ideas.” His theories on government were “radical” like the students around him.²² Eduardo Chibas, a student leader, later to become a prominent political and radio personality, was appointed Secretary of Public works. Other

²⁰ Welles to Secretary of State, September 10, 1933, Havana, 837.002/185; 837.00/3803.

²¹ Welles to Secretary of State, September 5, 1933, Havana, 837.00/Cespedes.

²² Welles to Secretary of State, September 10, 1933, Havana, 837.002/185; 837.00/3803.

cabinet members included Jose Barquin, Secretary of Treasury, and Dr. Carlos Finlay, Secretary of Sanitation.²³

Grau's intentions were heroic and reformist. Decrees were passed mandating an eight hour work day, requiring employers to ensure 50% of their work force was Cuban (and not lower paid immigrants), attempted to prevent the Cuban labor movement from being dominated by foreigners, and denounced the Platt Amendment, and otherwise encouraged the development of public works and domestic commerce. His administration gave public expression to the hopes and dreams of the student reformers, and yet failed to achieve lasting change in Cuba.

Strikes, violence and general disorder continued and even increased after Machado's ouster. The American Embassy reported that press censorship was, under Grau, "as severe a censorship as it was in the time of the Machado government." It was enforced by groups of students who have gone so far as to "inform the Associated Press correspondent here that they will not permit him to send to the United States any material other than favorable regarding present conditions in Cuba."²⁴

Roosevelt, even though he had mustered some troops and rattled the sword, denied that he had any intention of intervention. He told the press to "lay off" the intervention question because the administration had "absolutely no desire to

²³ Welles to Secretary of State, September 10, 1933, Havana, 837.002/185; 837.00/3803.

²⁴ Welles to Secretary of State, September 10, 1933, Havana, 837.002/185; 837.00/3803.

intervene" and was in fact "seeking every means to avoid it."²⁵ Roosevelt agreed with Welles' low opinion of Grau: "You have down there a committee of five gentlemen who are the last people that have been chosen by the Army, and no government has been set up."²⁶ Business Week reported "little confidence that the Grau San Martin government [would] be able to maintain its control over the army."²⁷ Roosevelt asserted "You can't call that a government,"²⁸ and so the United States continued to refuse to recognize the Grau regime.

Grau's inefficient government failed to collect taxes, which provided eighty percent of the government's revenue.²⁹ In November of 1933, Roosevelt said "it was up to the Cuban people to decide" who would run the government of Cuba, but apparently they did not possess a government that had the support of the Cuban people.³⁰ Business Week said "communists were blamed for the increasing number of strikes which . . . spread to at least thirty percent of the sugar mills,"³¹ and later reported a "growing demand [for intervention] from businessmen who fear that the situation will not be cleared up for some time if left to the local forces."³² The American business community in Cuba remained committed to Welles and held him

²⁵ Press Conference, September 6, 1933, Nixon, FDR & Foreign Affairs, 1:386.

²⁶ Press Conference, September 8, 1933, Nixon, FDR & Foreign Affairs, 1:392.

²⁷ Business Week, September 16, 1933, 35.

²⁸ Press Conference, September 8, 1933, Nixon, FDR & Foreign Affairs, 1:392.

²⁹ Business Week, January 30, 1934, 27.

³⁰ FDR at a press conference, November 24, 1933, Nixon, FDR & Foreign Affairs, 1:503.

³¹ Business Week, September 23, 1933, 26.

in high esteem, "regardless of the fact that they have been almost all put out of business."³³ Business Week reported that "in its present state, the citizenry is apt to start shooting at anything it dislikes. American targets might force Mr. Roosevelt into dreaded intervention."³⁴

Roosevelt Resists Intervention

The American refusal to intervene in Cuba in 1933 was a major change in US policy toward the island. American military intervention in Cuba and Central America, common in the first three decades of the twentieth century, was overturned by Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy. The December 16, 1933 issue of Business Week reported that the "really significant issue" of the week was that Roosevelt's Administration was holding discussions regarding the "withdrawal of the Platt Amendment" which gave the United States a "controlling hand in Cuban Affairs."³⁵

Even American business interests applauded Cuba's revolution. At the end of 1933, Business Week lauded the Cuban revolution of 1933 as one of the seven most influential events of the year. In importance, it ranked ahead of United States' diplomatic recognition of the USSR, and ahead of Japan's struggle for hegemony in Asia:

³² Ibid., October 7, 1933, 26.

³³ Roosevelt to Secretary of State, November 27, 1933, Nixon, FDR & Foreign Affairs, 1:504.

³⁴ Business Week, October 14, 1933, 12.

³⁵ Business Week, December 16, 1933, 27.

The overthrow of the Machado government in Cuba and the ultimate establishment of a liberal government entirely free from, in fact antagonistic to, the elements of the United States which had supported previous governments, is included in this year's highlights because it was accompanied by less of dictated intervention from Washington than any previous serious revolution in the Island. It probably marks the beginning of a new policy directed toward the building of economic friendship with Latin America. More than anything accomplished at the Montevideo Conference, it should improve relations of the United States with the countries of Latin America.³⁶

On September 6, 1933, the chief of the State Department's Division of Latin American Affairs met with ministers from many of the Latin American and Caribbean nations. The delegates voiced general approval of the US policy of non-intervention. Some said "of course the United States had a right to intervene," but US efforts to avoid intervention were "making a fine impression in Latin America."³⁷ The President of Guatemala felt that the "Cuban situation [was] exceedingly grave principally because of communistic tendencies. Consequently "American intervention is essential. . . ."³⁸

But Roosevelt remained opposed to the idea. On October 21, 1933, the magazine reported that Cuba had been "relatively quiet, except for the bombing of

³⁶ "The World in 1933 -- and 1934," *Ibid.*, December 30, 1933, 3-4.

³⁷ Memo by the chief of the Division of Latin American Affairs, September 6, 1933, *Ibid.*, 5:393.

³⁸ Chargé in Guatemala to the Secretary of State, September 6, 1933, *Ibid.*, 1:393-

some American shops."³⁹ Although the business journals showed concern for the situation in Cuba, they made no call for intervention.

Despite the US policy of non-intervention, American preparations for this contingency continued. On December 22, 1933, US Navy Captain J.C. Townsend submitted a report detailing twenty-six naval vessels prepared for an invasion of Cuba. As of December 22, 1933, sixteen of them were either already in Cuban waters, or waiting to sail from Key West.⁴⁰

Jefferson Caffery

Welles left Havana on December 13, 1933, with Grau's government still in place.⁴¹ Six days later Jefferson Caffery arrived as the new Ambassador. At that time, however, unrest in Cuba remained "sufficiently serious that holiday cruise boats, almost without exception, [were] avoiding Havana."⁴²

Still, the United States refused to recognize Grau, even though the British government pressured the United States to recognize him, "in the urgent interests of capital in Cuba."⁴³ Non-recognition was an insufferable handicap to any Caribbean

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³⁹ Ibid., October 21, 1933, 30.

⁴⁰ J.C. Townsend, Captain, USN, Director of Ship Movements, in a report to the State Department, December 22, 1933, Washington, 837.00/4551 LF.

⁴¹ Business Week, December 16, 1933, 27.

⁴² Ibid., December 23, 1933, 27.

⁴³ Welles to Caffery, January 6, 1934, U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1934, Vol. V, Latin America, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office), 5:94. Hereafter cited as FRUS 1934.

regime because it encouraged opposition groups to refuse to cooperate with the government. As long as the Opposition refused to cooperate, the island continued in a state of disorder; and, as long as there was disorder, the United States refused to recognize the Grau administration. Welles felt personally frustrated because Grau was not the man he put in power and in fact had come to power through unconstitutional means. He accused the Grau government of being under the influence of leftists and entirely incompatible with American interests. It is more likely that his opposition to Grau was for personal reasons instead of diplomatic interests, since his choice, Aurelio Hevia, had been rejected. Certainly, concern for American-owned property was not the only reason for nonrecognition.

Chaos In Cuba

From a U.S. Department of State memorandum, we learn that more than one thousand people had been lynched, and several hundred homes sacked, burned and plundered in Cuba under Grau's government:

“Human bodies in shreds have been paraded in triumph through the streets of Cuba. Corpses have been disinterred, dragged, mutilated and hung from posts before horrified gaze of onlookers.”

“The world was given the apotheosis of those oppositionists, who, during the Machado regime, murdered high and low Government officials.

“Human lives lost are infinitely greater and the prisons are filled as never before.”⁴⁴

The American Chargé reported from Cienfuegos that on January 8, 1934, a “police station [was] bombed at Matanzas” and “several other bombs [were] reported over [the] Province.”⁴⁵ Students were openly denouncing the Government of Grau San Martin, and soldiers experienced great difficulty in controlling them. American Chargé Samuel L. Dickson also reported that Matanzas was strongly patrolled by the Army and that “thirty policemen resigned last night in protest against the appointment of military chief of police” and that there was much pillaging throughout the province.”⁴⁶

On December 20, 1933, students at the University of Havana passed a vote of censure against the government of Grau San Martin, bitterly attacking him and the army. On December 21, 1933, a large number of students from the Havana high schools made a demonstration in front of the presidential palace shouting “down with Grau and death to Batista.”⁴⁷ Clearly, Grau’s “radical” student-oriented government had as much opposition from students as it did supporters. And even though Batista was originally sought out by the students, he now appeared to be rather unpopular. Grau was unpopular because he could not govern with any real effect -- the island was

⁴⁴ Memorandum, US State Department, December 13, 1933, Washington, 837.00.

⁴⁵ Samuel S. Dickson, Chargé d’Affairs, January 9, 1934, Cienfuegos, 837.00/4592.

⁴⁶ Samuel S. Dickson, Chargé d’Affairs, January 9, 1934, Cienfuegos, 837.00/4592.

⁴⁷ T.N. Gimperling, Lt. Colonel, US Army, Military Attaché, December 22, 1933, Havana, 837.00/4574.

close to a state of anarchy. Batista's unpopularity stemmed in part from the opposite reason -- with the army he could rule, but an army dictatorship was not what the students wanted.

Labor Unrest

Grau's problems were compounded by a split in his own ranks. One of his cabinet members, Secretary of Government Antonio Guiteras, with the support of "marine forces (the Navy), communists, unorganized labor and student radicals insisted upon a full "revolutionary program." Guiteras initiated a strike against his own government on December 14, 1933. The manager of United Fruit Company plant at Preston wired a note to the company headquarters reporting that the workers blew the whistle and all walked off the job without making any demands to management. The night before, Guiteras had asked United Fruit Company for permission to meet and it was granted. They talked about going on general strike unless United Fruit Company hired whomever the union officials wanted them to hire. The plant manager reported that the meeting was highly communistic.⁴⁸ In

⁴⁸ L.H. Woolsey in Memorandum for Mr. Ed Wilson, State Department, December 15, 1933, Washington, 837.00 B.

mid-December 1933, mobs burned the PAIS newspaper and murdered four men.⁴⁹

All in all, organized labor continued to oppose Grau.⁵⁰

Mediation or Invasion

Repeated notes found in diplomatic correspondence between the United States and Cuba reveal that the United States was preparing for a military intervention while Grau was president. Captain D.J. Kendall, United States Marine Corps, was sent ashore in early January 1934. He reported that there were German officer instructors in Havana, as well as five negro officers in the Army, including one Captain. He made recommendations for a Marine landing, if needed.⁵¹ The Uruguayan minister, Fernandez Medina, also continued to try to mediate the rift in US-Cuban relations, but with little success.⁵² Medina was generally unpopular, but Grau supported him. The ABC and Menocal's supporters, who still wanted Menocal to become president (again) refused to work with Medina because they only insisted that Batista be ousted.

Batista

⁴⁹ Matthews to Secretary of State, December 18, 1933, 837.00/4562.

⁵⁰ Samuel S. Dickson, Chargé d'Affairs, to Secretary of State, January 11, 1934, Havana, 837.00/4615.

⁵¹ Captain D.J. Kendall, USMC, January 5, 1934, 837.00/4604.

⁵² Caffery to Hull, January 10, 1934, FRUS 1934, 5:95.

During the tumultuous and increasingly out of control days of January 1934, Colonel⁵³ Batista began negotiating with the Navy for support to remove the government.⁵⁴ Aurelio Hevia, who was Grau's chosen successor, had only partial support of Mendieta's backers. Batista "has just sent me [Caffery] word" that "he has decided to declare Mendieta president this afternoon" and Caffery speculated that Batista "may meet with armed resistance from the Cuban Navy."⁵⁵ In January 1934, Batista held a meeting of military leaders at Camp Columbia to discuss the situation. Batista was anxious to get rid of Grau, and would have acted unilaterally, except some of his own staff suggested on waiting until a consensus for a replacement could be made. Mendieta and Batista also discussed removing Grau. On January 14, 1934, Mendieta told Caffery that he was willing to assume the presidency only if the United States was willing to guarantee official recognition of his government. Batista told Caffery that he would support Mendieta. Caffery felt that if Mendieta was not put into the presidency, then Batista would form a political alliance with the Left.⁵⁶ Jefferson Caffery wired Sumner Welles (in Washington, DC) and suggested that all the opposition sectors would accept Mendieta as president⁵⁷ even though Mendieta

⁵³ Batista was promoted to by Colonel on September 4, 1933 by the new government lead by Grau in order to bring order to solidify support within the Army for the revolution. Batista was appointed Chief of Staff for Grau's government after some mutual distrust and resentment – both realizing they needed the other's support.

⁵⁴ Jefferson Caffery, January 17, 1934, Havana, 837.00/4630.

⁵⁵ Caffery to Secretary of State, January 17, 1934, Havana, 837.00/4626.

⁵⁶ Caffery to Secretary of State, January 14, 1934, Havana, 837.00/4606.

⁵⁷ Caffery to Secretary of State, January 14, 1934, Havana , 837.00/4610.

had a “well known vacillating tendency and reluctance to assume responsibility.”⁵⁸ The Revolutionary Junta (Pentarchy) supported Hevia and Hevia secured a written promise of support from Carlos Mendieta.⁵⁹ Caffery reported on January 15, that Grau San Martin was willing to resign but Batista preferred that Mendieta took over.⁶⁰

Grau’s position was increasingly untenable as disorder and doubts inside Cuba about the permanency of his leadership grew and he realized his government would not be recognized by the United States – a necessity for the permanence of any Cuban government. Strikes and violence swelled and Grau entertained ideas of a change in government. Finally, Colonel Fulgencio Batista, the de facto source of power in the country, simply asked Caffery “what [the United States] wanted for recognition.”⁶¹ Caffery indicated that Grau remained unacceptable, and so when Batista withdrew his support Grau had little choice but to resign⁶² and turned the government over to his Secretary of Agriculture, Aurelio Hevia, on January 15, 1934.⁶³ A mob surrounded the palace and was dispersed with gunfire with one

⁵⁸ Caffery to Secretary of State, January 15, 1934, Havana, 837.00/4611.

⁵⁹ Caffery to Secretary of State, January 15, 1934, Havana, 837.00/4614.

⁶⁰ Caffery to Secretary of State, January 15, 1934, Havana, 837.00/4617.

⁶¹ Caffery to Welles, January 13, 1934, *Ibid.*, 5:97.

⁶² Jules Robert Benjamin, The United States and Cuba: Hegemony and Dependent Development, 1880-1934, (Pittsburgh, PA.:University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 169.

⁶³ Caffery to Assistant Secretary of State, 7:00 PM, January 15, 1934, FRUS 1934, 5:101.

killed.⁶⁴ Cuban land owners backed Hevia, but he had weak support among Mendieta's people.⁶⁵ Hevia resigned a few days later.

Mendieta and the End of the Platt Amendment

In a dramatic role reversal, it was a Cuban official who now informed the American Ambassador how events would unfold on the island: "Batista has just sent me [Caffery] word . . . he has declared [Carlos] Mendieta President this afternoon."⁶⁶ On January 18, 1934, four days after Batista asked Grau to resign, Colonel Carlos Mendieta was declared president of Cuba.⁶⁷ On January 23, 1934, the United States extended formal recognition to the government, with Roosevelt expressing great hope that Mendieta would be popular with the Cuban people and that he would be able to maintain law and order.⁶⁸ Now that a Cuban government had the support of the United States, Mendieta's chances of success were much better than those of Grau.

Mendieta's government did survive, although not without considerable turmoil. The administration was plagued with all of the difficulties that beset the previous presidents. But, on May 29, 1934, Cuba attained its long sought after complete independence when the United States signed a new Treaty of Relations with

⁶⁴ Caffery to Secretary of State, January 15, 1934, Havana, 837.00/4619.

⁶⁵ Caffery to Secretary of State, January 17, 1934, Havana, 837.00/4626.

⁶⁶ Caffery to Welles, January 17, 1934, FRUS 1934, 5:103.

⁶⁷ Chargé to Assistant Secretary of State, January 19, 1934, FRUS 1934, 5:105.

⁶⁸ Secretary of State to Caffery, January 23, 1934, FRUS 1934, 5:107; White House press conference, January 19, 1934, Nixon, FDR & Foreign Affairs, 1:593.

Cuba. This new treaty annulled the Platt Amendment.⁶⁹ The Tariff Reform Law of 1927 was renegotiated as soon as Machado was ousted: the US arranged a new trade agreement with Cuba eliminating much of the taxes on US imports, abandoning Cuban industrial protection, and reducing Cuba's tax revenue. The progress Machado made for Cuba in trade and economic policies disappeared after he was ousted.

Revolution and Violence Continue

Obviously the revolutionaries were not satisfied with the ouster of Machado. They continued to bomb and kill. In early June, 1934, President Mendieta was wounded when a bomb exploded at a naval banquet in Triscornia. Another cabinet member was injured and a naval officer was killed (his body inadvertently shielded Mendieta from the main force of the blast.) One suspect affiliated with a radical student group (Alma Mater) was arrested.⁷⁰

Conclusions

Carlos Mendieta desperately wanted to become the president of Cuba and fought Machado for the privilege while few others supported his quest. His own Conservative Party rejected him, the older more familiar politician, for newcomer Gerardo Machado, a member of the Liberal Party. Mendieta formed another party,

⁶⁹ United States Department of State, Treaty Information Bulletin No. 56, May 31, 1934, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934), 30.

the Nationalists, and then deferred to Menocal as its leader because Menocal was more popular. Mendieta could not win the primary or general elections in 1924. Mendieta failed in his quest to oust Machado by organizing an armed rebellion against Machado. In 1930, when given the opportunity, Mendieta refused to have his party run for office in the general congressional elections because he feared another defeat. He repeatedly demanded US military intervention to oust Machado. Finally, he was placed in office by Colonel Batista, with the support of the US government, without ever having earned a mandate from the Cuban people.

De Cespedes lasted only a few days in office. Grau and the Pentarchy lasted a few months. The headway Machado made in trade relations with the United States was reversed under Mendieta, even though the Platt Amendment was revoked. In no measureable way was Cuba better off economically under any of the next several administrations than it was under Machado. Even the statistical evidence that Susan Schroeder's work⁷¹ reviews in Chapter 9 (Economics)⁷² points to profound and beneficial changes under Machado despite the drop in sugar prices and the global depression that would not be reached again until decades later. Those Cubans and Americans acting to oust Machado erred when they replaced a very capable and proven leader with irresponsible men of little talent or leadership.

⁷⁰ Jefferson Caffery to Secretary of State, June 15, 1934, Havana, 837.00 I-Mendieta, Carlos/10.

⁷¹ Schroeder, Cuban Statistics.

⁷² See page 70 of this manuscript.