
CUBA, c. 1930-1959

No part of Cuba escaped the ravages of the war with Spain that ended in 1898. From the eastern mountains across the central plains to the western valleys, the scene of desolation and devastation was the same. It was a brutal conflict in which the opposing armies seemed determined more to punish the land than prosecute the war, practising pillage of every kind for almost four years. More than 100,000 small farms, 3,000 livestock ranches and 700 coffee *fincas* were destroyed. Of the estimated 1,100 sugar mills registered in 1894, only 207 survived. Property-owners, urban and rural, were in debt and lacked either access to capital or sources of credit.

This devastation was neither unforeseen nor unplanned. In fact, it was the principal purpose for which Cubans, who understood well the political economy of colonialism, had taken up arms. It was indeed a war against property, and by 1898 separatist tactics had vindicated the goal of separatist strategy: Spain was on the brink of collapse. But the success of the Cuban military campaign did not produce the desired political results. Rather, it precipitated United States intervention, and at this point all the Cubans' plans went awry. They had thrown everything into the campaign against Spain. Victory over Spain left them exhausted, weak and vulnerable.

Armed intervention led to military occupation, at the end of which, in May 1902, the United States had effectively reduced Cuban independence to a mere formality. The Platt Amendment denied the new republic treaty-making authority, established limits on the national debt and sanctioned North American intervention for 'the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property and individual liberty'. The reciprocity treaty not only bound Cuba's principal export commodity, sugar, to a single market, the United States, but also opened key sectors of the Cuban economy – agriculture (especially sugar and tobacco), cattle-ranching, mining (especially iron), transportation (especially railways),

utilities (gas, electricity, water, telephones) and banking – to foreign, mainly U.S., control.

By the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, whereas total British investments stood at \$60 million, largely in telephones, railways, port works and sugar; French investments at \$12 million, principally in railroads, banks and sugar; and German investments at \$4.5 million, divided between factories and utilities; United States capital invested in Cuba exceeded \$200 million. Under the reciprocity treaty preferential access to U.S. markets for Cuban agricultural products served to encourage Cuban dependency on sugar and, to a lesser extent, tobacco, and to increase foreign control over vital sectors of the economy. Reciprocity also discouraged economic diversification by promoting the consolidation of land from small units into the latifundia and concentration of ownership from local family to foreign corporation. And the effects of reciprocity were not confined to agriculture. The reduction of Cuban duties, in some instances as high as 40 per cent, opened the island to North American imports on highly favourable terms. The privileged access granted the U.S. manufacturers created a wholly inauspicious investment climate for Cuban capital. Even before 1903 the dearth of local capital and depressed economic conditions had combined to prevent development of national industry; after the reciprocity treaty prospects for local enterprise diminished further. North American manufactured goods saturated the Cuban market and hindered the development of local competition. Many firms could not compete with United States manufactures, and business failures increased.

Within a decade of the War of Independence the United States had become a pervasive presence in Cuba, totally dominating the economy, thoroughly penetrating the social fabric and fully controlling the political process. The ubiquity of this presence served to shape the essential character of the early republic.

Cuban politics acquired a distinctively distributive quality soon after independence. Because much of the national wealth rapidly passed into the hands of foreigners, political office guaranteed successful office-seekers and the retinue of their supporters access to the levers of resource and benefit allocation in the only enterprise wholly Cuban – government. Re-election violated the intra-elite protocol implicit in the electoral method of circulating public office. Monopolization of public office by one party, or one faction of a party, threatened to block access of others to the sinecures of

state. Insofar as public administration under the republic served as a principal source of livelihood for the elites, elections institutionalized a process among power contenders by which participants shared, more or less equally, a guaranteed cyclical access to government. Indeed, so vital was the preservation of this system that the presidential succession precipitated armed protest in 1906, after the re-election of Tomás Estrada Palma, and again in 1917 against Mario G. Menocal.

Resistance to the re-election of President Gerardo Machado for a second term in 1928 came from the traditional Conservative and Popular parties, but also from within his own Liberal Party. In 1927, Carlos Mendieta broke with the party and established the Unión Nacionalista, openly opposed to presidential re-election. Other well-known party leaders, such as the disaffected Liberals Federico Laredo Bru and Roberto Méndez Peñate and the former Conservative president Mario G. Menocal, protested against re-electionism and fled into exile to organize opposition to Machado.

However, the challenge to the *machadato* did not originate principally from the established parties. New forces were stirring in Cuban society. By the 1920s the first republican-born generation of Cubans had reached political maturity and found the republic wanting. National disillusionment found expression first in the marketplace of ideas, in university reform, new literary and artistic currents, and fresh perspectives on history. Disillusionment gave way to disaffection as hopes for cultural regeneration fused with visions of political redemption. The political agenda expanded to include anti-imperialism, nationalism and social justice, but it was primarily against banality of national politics and the improbability of public officials that this generation directed its ire. In March 1923 radical intellectuals published a manifesto denouncing corruption in government. A month later the Junta de Renovación Nacional Cívica published a lengthy denunciation of graft, corruption and fraud. In August the veterans organization joined former officers of the old Liberation Army with dissident intellectuals to demand political and administrative reforms. Discontent spread to other sectors of society. In 1923, university students organized into the Federación Estudiantil Universitaria (FEU). Labour militancy increased as trade unions expanded at both provincial and national levels. In 1925, workers organized the Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba (CNOC), the first national labour organization. In that same year, the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) was founded.

Intellectuals, students and labour had pushed dissent beyond the limits of traditional partisan politics and into the realm of reform and revolution.

The very content of the national debate had changed. The republican generation was possessed of a peculiar redemptive mission, one that had as its goal the total regeneration of the republic — one, too, that challenged as much the assumptions upon which Machado governed as it did Machado's government.

Nevertheless, in 1927, through a combination of intimidation, coercion and bribery, Machado eventually secured the joint nomination of the traditional parties for a second term. *Cooperativismo*, as the arrangement became known, joined the Liberal, Conservative and Popular parties behind Machado's candidacy for re-election. More important, it ended all semblance of party independence and political competition, the traditional sources of anti-reelectionist violence. Later in 1927 Machado also secured congressional passage of a resolution amending the Constitution to extend the presidential term of office by two years. And in November 1928, unopposed as the *candidato único*, Machado won re-election to a new six-year term.

In many ways the re-election of Machado represented a collective response by the traditional political elites to the profound changes overtaking Cuban society. *Cooperativismo* was itself a necessary coalition among the embattled traditional parties designed to overcome the mounting challenge to the old order. For thirty years, the veterans of the nineteenth-century wars for independence had dominated the island's politics, bargaining among themselves political accommodations to ensure their continued pre-eminence. In 1928 this political community of interests found its logical conclusion in the *cooperativista* consensus. Indeed, *cooperativismo* promised to stabilize intra-elite politics at a time when the politicians were themselves under siege and facing the most serious challenge to their thirty-year rule of the republic.

The re-election of Machado in 1928 certainly served both to deepen opposition and give focus to dissent. But it was the world depression that accelerated political confrontation and intensified social conflict. Sugar production, the fulcrum upon which the entire Cuban economy balanced, dropped 60 per cent. In mid-1930 economic conditions deteriorated further when the United States enacted the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act, a protectionist measure that increased duties on Cuban sugar. (The Cuban share of the U.S. market shrank from 49.4 per cent in 1930 to 25.3 per cent in 1933.) Sugar producers struggled to remain solvent by lowering wages and cutting production through labour lay-offs. The *zafra* was

reduced to a sixty-two-day harvest, only two months' work for tens of thousands of sugar-workers. Some 250,000 heads of families, representing approximately 1 million people out of a total population of 3.9 million, found themselves totally unemployed. Those fortunate enough to escape total unemployment found temporary work difficult to come by and wages depressed. Pay for agricultural workers declined by 75 per cent, wages in the sugar zones falling as low as twenty cents a day. In some districts labourers received only food and lodging for their work. Wages for the urban proletariat decreased by 50 per cent as commercial, banking and manufacturing failures reached record proportions. In 1930 the government announced drastic salary cuts for all public employees except the armed forces, and the first of a series of redundancies in the state sector was imposed the following year. Members of the well-established middle class, particularly those professional groups that had traditionally found security and solvency in the civil service and public administration, were among the newest arrivals to augment the swelling ranks of the unemployed.

By 1930, as the full effects of the economic crisis reverberated across the island, virtually all sectors of Cuban society were at odds with the Machado government. In March 1930 a general strike organized by the outlawed CNOG and supported by 200,000 workers paralysed the island; in September a student anti-government protest resulted in violence and the closing of the university. As mass demonstrations spread, union membership expanded strikes halting production in key sectors of the economy including cigar-manufacturing, metallurgy, construction and textiles, in 1929 and 1930. The 1930 general strike ended only after fierce repression, arrests, torture and assassinations becoming commonplace. Increased repression did not, however, reduce resistance. On the contrary, opposition to Machado increased. A desultory warfare broke out in the countryside, the torching of canefields destroying millions of *arrobas* of cane. Armed bands operated throughout the interior, ambushing trains, cutting telephone and telegraph wires and attacking isolated Rural Guard posts. In November 1930, the government proclaimed a state of siege throughout the island. Army units in full combat dress assumed police functions in provincial cities and towns. Military supervisors displaced civilian governors in Pinar del Río, Matanzas, Las Villas, Camagüey and Oriente, and army tribunals superseded civilian courts. Constitutional guarantees were restored on 1 December but suspended again ten days later. Repression depended upon an extensive police apparatus: a secret police was organized — the *Sección de Expertos*, specialists in the method of torture — while the *Partida de la*

Porra served as a government death squad. Cuba assumed the appearance of an armed camp under a regime for which neutrality was suspect and the slightest criticism was subversive.

The organized opposition responded in kind, several groups taking up arms to challenge Machado. The ABC consisted of intellectuals, professionals and students, organized in clandestine cells and committed to creating conditions of revolution through systematic use of violence against the government. The Organización Celular Radical Revolucionaria (OCRR) also adopted a cellular structure and adopted armed struggle and sabotage as the means to overthrow Machado. In 1931 an ideological dispute within the Directorio Estudiantil Universitario (DEU) resulted in the formation of the Ala Izquierda Estudiantil (AIE) which, dedicated to the radical transformation of Cuban society, formed 'action squads' of urban guerrillas and carried the struggle into the streets. The PCC expanded its revolutionary activities as well as asserting leadership over key trade unions, most notably CNOC. In 1932, sugar-workers established the first national union, the Sindicato Nacional Obrero de la Industria Azucarera (SNOIA) while women's resistance groups, university professors, and normal-school teachers and students joined an underground network dedicated to armed struggle against Machado. By the early 1930s, the crisis was moving beyond a political settlement. As economic conditions deteriorated and social unrest spread, the struggle against Machado was changing daily into a movement seeking more to overturn a system rather than overthrow a president.

In 1933 Cuba quivered at the brink of revolution. Sixty per cent of the population lived at submarginal levels of under \$300 in annual real income; another 30 per cent earned marginal wages between \$300 and \$600. Early in the year exiled opposition leaders organized into a revolutionary junta in New York and called for a national revolution to remove Machado. The Cuban ambassador to Washington acknowledged privately to the State Department that the beleaguered Machado government faced serious political trouble and appealed to the new Democratic administration for immediate U.S. support. Otherwise, he predicted somberly, 'chaos would result, the sort of chaos that might easily require the United States to intervene in a military way'.¹ However, Washington

¹ William Phillips, 'Memorandum of Conversation with Cuban Ambassador', 5 May 1933, File 550 S.S. Washington/415, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereinafter cited as RG 59).

was unwilling to entertain the idea of armed intervention in 1933. Having committed his administration to a Latin American policy based on the notion of a 'good neighbour', Franklin Roosevelt was unwilling to inaugurate a new phase in hemispheric relations by sending troops to Cuba. Washington favoured instead a negotiated political settlement in which Machado would resign before the expiration of his term in 1935, thereby permitting a coalition of moderate political groups to form a provisional government.

Developments in Cuba concerned the United States in another way. The U.S. was also concerned by the fact that its grip over the Cuban economy was slipping. In the three decades since the signing of the reciprocity treaty, a series of developments had altered U.S.-Cuban trade patterns. The tariff law of 1927 launched Cuba on an import substitution program, increasing self-sufficiency in a variety of products formerly imported, including eggs, butter, lard, shoes, furniture and hosiery. U.S. exports to Cuba also suffered from increased foreign competition as the depression and the drop of Cuba's purchasing power combined to make the island a price market and opened the door to the importation of cheap commodities from Europe and Japan previously supplied by the United States on a quality basis.

The effects were substantial. Between 1923 and 1933, Cuban imports from the United States declined from \$191 million to \$22 million while Cuban exports to the United States decreased from \$362 million to \$57 million. The U.S. share in Cuban imports diminished from 74.3 per cent during the First World War to 66.7 per cent in 1922 and 61.8 per cent in 1927. By 1933 it had decreased to 53.5 per cent, and Cuba had dropped from sixth to sixteenth place as a customer for U.S. exports. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimated that the loss of Cuban markets for foodstuffs alone meant the withdrawal of 817,267 acres from agricultural production in the United States. Exports to Cuba of raw materials and manufactured products other than foodstuffs dropped from \$133 million in 1924 to \$18 million in 1933.

The purpose of U.S. policy in Cuba, thus, was twofold: first, to end conditions of political instability and, second, to recover control over Cuban markets. To these ends the State Department appointed Sumner Welles as ambassador to Cuba. Welles' instructions directed him to offer the 'friendly mediations' of the United States for the purpose of securing a 'definite, detailed, and binding understanding' between the government

and the opposition.² And early in June, Welles secured the agreement of the government parties and moderate opposition, including the ABC, OCRR and the Unión Nacionalista, to participate in discussion.

Through the early summer the actual purpose of Welles' mission to Havana remained unknown and undisclosed. Methodically and patiently, Welles manoeuvred the mediations towards the twin objectives of persuading Machado to resign and thus bring the Cuban political crisis to a peaceful conclusion. Yet these were only the means. The objective was to end the revolutionary threat to the institutional structures upon which Cuban elites ruled, and upon which U.S. hegemony rested, and to establish a government in Cuba that would renegotiate a new reciprocity treaty, thereby restoring North American primacy in Cuban's foreign commerce. 'The negotiation at this time of a reciprocal trade agreement with Cuba . . .', Wells wrote from Havana, 'will not only revivify Cuba but will give us practical control of a market we have been steadily losing for the past ten years not only for our manufactured products but for our agricultural exports'.³

Machado had outlived his usefulness. The order and stability which he had provided during his first term, and which had won Washington's support for his re-election, had collapsed. The anti-Machado struggle had stepped beyond the bounds of conventional political competition and generalized into a revolutionary situation. After nearly five years of sustained civil strife it had become apparent that Machado could not restore order. His continued presence was now the greatest single obstacle to the restoration of order and stability. In late July, Welles informed the unsuspecting President that a satisfactory solution to the crisis required him to shorten his term by one year. Machado responded first with incredulity and then with rage. He convened a special session of Congress to repudiate the proposed settlement, vowing to remain in power through his full term of office.

In the days that followed, Welles worked to undermine Machado's domestic support as a means of forcing him into early retirement. If Machado fell solely through North American pressure, the traditional political parties, discredited by their collaboration with Machado, faced the prospect of drastic reorganization, at best, or complete suppression — as many opposition factions demanded. The success of an internal revolt

² Cordell Hull to Sumner Welles, 1 May 1933, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1933*, 5 vols. (Washington, D.C.: 1941), 5:285.

³ Sumner Welles to Cordell Hull, 13 May, 1933, 833.00/3512, DS/RG 59.

against the government similarly threatened the old party structure with extinction by subjecting Machado supporters to political reprisals from the regime's opponents. Support for the ambassador's recommendations, however, carried some assurances that the parties would survive the *machadato*. In early August, therefore, the leaders of the Liberal, Conservative and Popular parties endorsed the mediator's proposals and introduced in Congress legislation designed to expedite Machado's departure.

Welles moved next against the diplomatic underpinnings of the Cuban government and threatened Machado with the withdrawal of North American support. He insisted that under the terms of the Platt Amendment, Machado had simply failed to maintain a government adequate for the protection of life, property and individual liberty. The continuation of these conditions, Welles warned Machado, would require U.S. intervention. To Washington, Welles recommended the withdrawal of diplomatic recognition if, at the end of a reasonable period, Machado continued to resist early retirement. He assured the State Department that this would obviate the necessity of an armed intervention by making it impossible for Machado to survive in power much longer.

In mid-summer the struggle between the U.S. ambassador and the Cuban President assumed a new urgency. On 25 July bus drivers in Havana organized a strike in protest against a new government tax. Within a week a clash between the protesting drivers and the police resulted in sympathy strikes among taxi drivers, streetcar operators and truck drivers. The transportation strike in the capital spread to other sectors and within days all movement of people and goods came to a halt. By the end of the first week of August, the general strike had acquired the full proportions of a revolutionary offensive and Welles and Machado had acquired a much more formidable adversary that threatened to sweep aside both the regime of Machado and U.S. hegemony.

Machado and Welles recognized the gravity of the strike and turned immediately to defuse the deepening revolutionary situation. Each took extraordinary steps to end the strike. Machado conferred with the leadership of the PCC and CNOC, offering the party legality and the CNOC recognition in exchange for their support in ending the strike. It was an opportunity seized by the Communist Party. Under the terms of the agreement, the government released labour leaders and Communists from prison and proclaimed the legality of the PCC upon the end of the strike. The party leadership, in return, issued return-to-work orders. In fact, however, both Machado and the PCC misjudged conditions. The govern-

ment believed the party controlled the strike; the PCC believed the government to be stronger than it was. But the strike had evolved beyond the Communist control and the government was beyond salvation.

For Welles, Machado's departure could no longer wait until May 1934, the date set for the President's early retirement. His resignation was required immediately. The ambassador would later recall that the 'ominous signs provided by a paralyzing strike' necessitated a 'radical solution' to the Cuban problem to 'forestall the cataclysm which otherwise was inevitable'.⁴ On 11 August, Welles reported a confidential talk with Secretary of War and former army chief General Alberto Herrera in which he offered Herrera the presidency in exchange for his support in a quick resolution of the crisis. This arrangement was a direct invitation to the armed forces to impose a political settlement.

The army was already predisposed to act. Indeed, the armed forces had a considerable stake in the outcome of the political conflict. The mediations had not inspired confidence within the high command while rising anti-militarism among the opposition had contributed to a general restlessness among the officer corps. Opposition groups used the negotiations as a forum to denounce the military, the ABC advocating a reduction in the size of the military establishment and restrictions on army authority. One report circulating throughout Havana suggested that the opposition planned to reduce the army from 12,000 to 3,000 officers and men. Business and professional groups, troubled by the excessive taxation required to support the military, similarly advocated reductions in the army. As a result, army intervention in August 1933 was not unconditional. The armed forces acted only after having secured in advance assurances from opposition leaders, to which Welles subscribed, that the subsequent government would respect the integrity of the military. A 'strictly confidential' memorandum pledged that the armed forces would be maintained without any alteration until 20 May 1935, the scheduled expiration of Machado's second term. The proviso further stipulated that 'members of the said armed forces . . . cannot be removed from their positions nor punished' in any way inconsistent with the existing laws.⁵

On 12 August, the army demanded and secured Machado's resignation.

⁴ Sumner Welles, *Two Years of the 'Good Neighbor' Policy*, Department of State, Latin American Series No. 11 (Washington, D.C., 1935), pp. 8-9.

⁵ 'Memorandum', 11 August 1933, enclosure in Orestes Ferrara to Sumner Welles, 12 August 1933, File (1933) 800, U.S. Embassy, Cuba, Correspondence, Record Group 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the United States, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Herrera's succession was, however, resisted on grounds that the Secretary of War was too closely identified with the fallen president. Undeterred, Welles continued to pursue an orderly and constitutional resolution of the crisis. All *machadista* cabinet members except Herrera resigned. Herrera then served as provisional president only long enough to appoint as Secretary of State Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, who was something of a political non-entity – or 'statesman', as he loftily described himself – an inoffensive compromise candidate who lacked affiliation with any political party or political tendency. Herrera then resigned to permit Céspedes to succeed as president.

The Céspedes government set in sharp relief the contradictions generated during the *machadato*. The Welles mediations had served to legitimize the formerly outlawed anti-Machado groups and guarantee their inclusion in the new government. On the other hand, the timely desertion of the dictator by the former government parties guaranteed them a political role in post-Machado Cuba. The distribution of government portfolios to representatives of such diverse factors as the ABC, the Liberal Party, the Unión Nacionalista, the Conservative Party, the OCRR and the Partido Popular, previously implacable adversaries, served to institutionalize the unresolved disputes of the *machadato*.

The difficulties confronting the new government were not, however, confined to internal contradictions. The departure of Machado had produced an immediate halt to government repression, and the change of governments clearly reduced national tensions and eased mounting revolutionary pressures. But Cuba remained in the throes of the depression, and the social and economic dislocations that had plunged the *machadato* into crisis continued unabated after 12 August. Strikes persisted as the new mood of labour militancy extended across the island. The organizations that had earlier boycotted the mediations – principally those sectors of the anti-Machado opposition that aspired to something more than simply a change of presidents – found the Céspedes solution wholly unsatisfactory. Many of these groups, including the two student organizations, the DEU and the AIE, and the Communist Party, had toiled too long in the pursuit of revolution to settle for a palace coup as the denouement of their political labour.

There were other problems for Céspedes. Public order had broken down. The rioting produced by Machado's flight continued intermittently through August, the mobs dispensing revolutionary justice to suspected

machadista officials. Army and police authorities, formerly the object of popular enmity, now moved to control civilian excesses only tentatively, if at all. Many officers feared that strict enforcement of order under Céspedes would serve only to revive anti-army sentiment among those former opposition groups now in power. This military morale was in any case at a low level. Senior officers lived in fear of arrest and reprisals for their part in the *machadato* while junior officers eagerly awaited the promotions certain to follow the purge of *machadista* commanders. Non-commissioned officers and enlisted men grew increasingly restive as rumours foretold of impending pay cuts and troop reductions.

The end of the Céspedes government came from a most improbable and unexpected source. On the evening of 3 September sergeants, corporals and enlisted men of Camp Columbia in Havana met to discuss their grievances, the deliberations ending with the preparation of a list of demands to be submitted to the commanding officers. The officers on duty, however, declined to discuss the demands of the aroused soldiery and instead retired from the army post. Suddenly, and unexpectedly, the troops found themselves in control of Camp Columbia and in mutiny. The NCO protesters, under the leadership of Sergeant Fulgencio Batista, exhorted the troops to hold the post until the army command agreed to review their demands.

The soldiers' protest immediately received support from anti-government groups. In the early hours of 4 September, student leaders of the DEU arrived at Camp Columbia and persuaded the sergeants to expand the movement. Civilian intervention changed the nature of the NCO protest and transformed a mutiny into a putsch. The 'sergeants' revolt', as the mutiny later became known, was originally possessed of less ambitious objectives. The sergeants planned a demonstration only to protest against service conditions, specifically poor pay, inadequate housing facilities and rumoured cuts in the enlisted ranks – not the ouster of the officer corps or the overthrow of Céspedes. Having unexpectedly found themselves in a state of mutiny, and effectively in rebellion against the government, there was little enthusiasm to return to the barracks under the existing regime. The students offered an alternative. It was a coalition of convenience, not without flaw, but one that offered rebellious troops absolution and dissident civilians political power. Out of this tentative civil–military consensus emerged a revolutionary junta composed of Ramón Grau San Martín, Porfirio Franca, Guillermo Portela, José Irizarri and Sergio Carbó.

The transfer of the revolutionary junta from the Camp Columbia barracks to the presidential palace served to shift the locus of authority in Cuba. Power passed to those forces long situated at the fringes of the republican polity – radicals and nationalists – who saw themselves as the agents of a historical imperative as well as the instruments of a popular mandate. On the morning of 5 September, a political manifesto announced the establishment of a new Provisional Revolutionary Government and proclaimed the affirmation of national sovereignty, the establishment of a modern democracy and the 'march toward the creation of a new Cuba'.

The forces of old Cuba responded with more than indignation to the September usurpation. The established government parties that earlier had deserted Machado as a means to survive the discredited regime once again faced persecution and extinction. So too did the ousted *machadista* army officers who, for all their efforts to secure immunity from post-Machado reprisals, now found themselves vulnerable to prosecution and imprisonment. Representatives of business and commercial sectors recoiled in horror at the change of governments and openly predicted the collapse of the Cuban economy. Nor was it only old Cuba which opposed the revolutionary junta. New political groups, including the ABC and the OCRR, organizations that previously had paid dearly to attain political power in post-Machado Cuba, faced an abrupt and inglorious end to their debut in national politics. A government composed of radical students and created by mutinous soldiers had the immediate effect of uniting in opposition those political forces which had earlier been rivals in power.

The provisional government faced its most formidable adversary in the person of Sumner Welles, the U.S. ambassador. The coup had undermined constitutional legality and overthrown conservative authority, both of which had been arduously defended by Welles. The ambassador was neither slow to react nor unequivocal in his response. His immediate recourse was to recommend, unsuccessfully, U.S. military intervention in order to restore Céspedes to power. Welles deliberately characterized the new government in terms calculated to arouse suspicion and provoke opposition in Washington. The army had fallen under 'ultra-radical control', Welles cabled Washington, and the government was 'frankly communistic'. Irizarri was characterized as a 'radical of the extreme type' while Grau and Portela were described as 'extreme radicals'.⁶

⁶ Sumner Welles to Secretary of State, 5 September 1933, 837.00/3757, RG 59, and 'Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between Secretary of State Hull and Welles', 5 September 1933, 837.00/3800, RG 59.

Early opposition to the provisional government produced a number of immediate changes. In mid-September, the junta dissolved in favor of a more traditional executive form of government under Ramón Grau San Martín. Fear that the combination of political intrigue and disarray in the army command would result in the collapse of public order prompted the government to promote Fulgencio Batista to the rank of colonel and appoint him as army chief. He was instructed to commission new officers in sufficient numbers to maintain stability in the armed forces. In early October, the government proclaimed the former officers deserters and ordered their arrest, thereby paving the way for a total reorganization of the army under Batista. This certainly strengthened the position of the provisional government. But the purge of the old officer corps was also a political triumph for the army and a personal victory for Fulgencio Batista. And this deepened the contradictions within the provisional government. Students and soldiers remained inextricably bound together in the original transgression against constituted authority, and they shared mutual interests in the fortune of the provisional government, if only because they shared a common fate if it failed. Nevertheless, the gap between them widened after 4 September. The students carried Cuba into the realm of experimental government, not least because this was the first administration of the republic not formed with Washington's support. Reform proved to be intoxicating, and for one hundred days the students devoted themselves with exalted purposefulness to the task of transforming the country. Under the injunction of 'Cuba for Cubans', the new government proceeded to enact reforms laws at a dizzying pace, committing itself to economic reconstruction, social change and political reorganization. The new government abrogated the Platt Amendment and dissolved all the *machadista* parties. Utility rates were lowered by 40 per cent and interest rates reduced. Women received the vote and the university secured autonomy. In labour matters, government reforms included minimum wages for cane-cutters, compulsory labour arbitration, an eight-hour day, workers' compensation, the establishment of a Ministry of Labour, and a Nationalization of Labour decree requiring that 50 per cent of all employees in industry, commerce and agriculture be Cuban nationals. In agricultural affairs, the government sponsored the creation of *colono* associations, guaranteed peasants permanent right over land they occupied and inaugurated a program of agrarian reform.

As the students continued to advance on their 'march to create a new Cuba', the army became an increasingly reluctant escort. Military support

of the provisional government was always more an expression of self-interest than a function of solidarity. This was the government that had sanctioned the sergeants' sedition and validated hundreds of new commissions, a government from which the new army command derived its legitimacy. But it was also true that the new leaders of the army were anxious for an immediate political settlement, if for no other reason than to institutionalize their recent gains. The army command saw little to be gained by social experimentation except a prolongation of uncertainty. Indeed, many *septembrista* commanders perceived the student projects as hazardous ventures, ill-conceived programs of a government upon whose solvency they depended to legitimize ill-gotten commissions.

These fears were skillfully exploited by Welles. By mid-autumn, he shifted his attention away from promoting unity among anti-government factions to encouraging division among its supporters. An astute observer of Cuban politics, Welles was well aware of the deepening contradictions within the provisional government. The sergeants' revolt, Welles reminded Washington, did 'not take place in order to place Grau San Martín in power'. He added that the 'divergence between the Army and civilian elements in the government is fast becoming daily more marked' and as Batista's influence grew 'the power of the students and Grau San Martín diminished'.⁷ Another political coalition, Welles reasoned, one capable of constituting itself into legitimate government and willing to ratify the *septembrista* army command, could persuade Batista to abandon the government that had originally conferred military legitimacy on an army mutiny.

For the second time in as many months, Welles appealed directly to the army to overturn a government that had fallen into North American disfavour. On 4 October, days after the arrest of the former officers, the ambassador reported having had a 'protracted and very frank discussion' with Batista. Now characterizing Batista as the 'only individual in Cuba today who represented authority', Welles informed the army chief that he had earned the support of 'the very great majority of the commercial and financial interests in Cuba who are looking for protection and who could only find such protection in himself'. Political factions that only weeks earlier had openly opposed him, Welles explained, were now 'in accord that his control of the Army as chief of staff should be continued as the only possible solution and were willing to support him in that capacity'.

⁷ Sumner Welles to Secretary of State, 5 October 1933, 837.00/4131, RG 59.

However, the only obstacle to an equitable arrangement, and presumably recognition and a return to normality, the ambassador suggested, 'was the unpatriotic and futile obstinacy of a small group of young men who should be studying in the university instead of playing politics and of a few individuals who had joined with them for selfish motives'. In a thinly veiled warning, Welles had reminded Batista of the tenuous position in which affiliation with the government placed him: 'should the present government go down in disaster, that disaster would necessarily inextricably involve not only himself but the safety of the Republic, which he had publicly pledged himself to maintain'.⁸

Welles' comments could not have been interpreted by Batista in any other fashion than an invitation to create a new government. These meetings served also to underscore the uncertainty of Batista's position. Non-recognition continued to encourage opposition and resistance. There remained a danger that a revolt would topple the provisional government and lead to the nullification of the *septembrista* army command and arrest of the former sergeants. Nor had prospects of a U.S. military intervention entirely passed, further raising the possibility that the United States would return Céspedes to power. Batista's authority within the armed forces was also threatened by his continued support of a government diplomatically opposed abroad and politically isolated at home. His command over the army rested on the sanction of a provisional government facing an uncertain future. Batista was simply one of four hundred recently promoted non-commissioned officers whose rank and appointment depended on a political settlement in Havana compatible with – or at least not hostile to – the new army hierarchy. As long as the *septembrista* officers remained identified with a government lacking legitimacy and deprived of the authority to underwrite permanently the promotions of 4 September, they risked sharing the ultimate fate of a regime opposed at home and abroad. Batista's own position within the army depended on his ability to legitimize the new commissions through a political settlement satisfactory to organized political and economic groups and Washington.

The end was not long in coming. In December, Welles reported with some satisfaction that Batista was actively seeking a change in government owing to his apprehension of a conspiracy within the army, the persistence of anti-government intrigue and fear of a North American intervention. In

⁸ Ibid.

January 1934, Batista withdrew army support from Grau and backed the old disaffected Liberal politician, Carlos Mendieta. Within five days, the United States recognized Mendieta. Supported diplomatically abroad and with established political backing at home, the new government moved immediately to ratify the new army commissions. Decree Number 408 formally dissolved the old National Army and proclaimed in its place the newly organized Constitutional Army. The new army was to consist of all officers, non-commissioned officers and enlisted men on active duty at the time the decree was promulgated.

The forces of change released during the *machadato* did not abate with the passing of the Grau government. On the contrary, they found new forms of expression. The ancien regime had certainly found renewed life in new army chief Batista and old Liberal leader Mendieta, but not without renewed challenge. Most immediately, the reform program of the short-lived provisional government acquired institutional vitality with the organization in 1934 of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (PRC/Auténtico) while, under the leadership of Antonio Guiteras, formerly Grau's minister of government, radicals formed a clandestine revolutionary organization, Joven Cuba. Eschewing electoral politics, Joven Cuba adopted armed struggle as the principal means to combat the Batista–Mendieta government. Assassination, bombings and sabotage again became the dominant mode of political opposition. Student opposition resumed with the reopening of the University of Havana in 1934. Anti-government demonstrations and labour protests once again became commonplace. Between 1934 and 1935 more than one hundred strikes flared up across the island.

In March 1935 momentum for revolutionary change assumed formidable proportions when an anti-government general strike plunged the island into crisis. Unlike August 1933, however, the government was neither willing to negotiate with labour nor reluctant to persecute participants. Proclamation of martial law announced a reign of terror that lasted through late spring. Strike leaders were arrested, many were tortured and assassinated, others fled into exile. Unions were outlawed and the university was occupied. In the weeks that followed military firing squads executed civilian dissidents. In May 1935 the army killed Antonio Guiteras.

The 1935 general strike was the last revolutionary surge of the republican generation. It collapsed after only a few days but its effects lasted

through the decade. Most immediately, the severity of the military repression caused dissension in and then the dissolution of the ruling coalition. By the end of March, Mendieta found his support reduced to his own faction in the Unión Nacionalista and the military. Within months, he too, resigned. In a very real sense then, the strike achieved its desired effect but did not accomplish its principal objective. The Mendieta government did indeed collapse but in so doing created a political vacuum filled by Batista and the armed forces. Virtually every branch of government passed under army control. Military supervisors replaced provincial and municipal officials, the army command purging striking civil servants and establishing control over every division of public administration. The army emerged as the most important source of patronage and public employment. Batista was now the single most dominant political force on the island.

Batista's prestige increased throughout the 1930s as he restored order and stability. Washington found in the Pax Batistiana sufficient cause to continue diplomatic support for the dictator's puppet presidents and shadow governments: José A. Barnet (1935-6), Miguel Mariano Gómez (1936), and Federico Laredo Bru (1936-40). Nor did Batista's opponents of the 1930s recover. The tempest of the decade had blown itself out. Many of the most prominent opponents of the Batista-Mendieta regime had lost their lives in 1935. Others sought personal security in exile or departed Cuba to carry the banner of revolution to other lands, most notably Spain. Revolutionary groups had been shattered and crushed. When the university reopened in 1937 classes resumed uneventfully. The PRC/Auténtico turned to electoral politics and devoted itself to the arduous work of constructing a new party infrastructure and developing grass-roots support. Moreover, by the end of the decade, the Communist Party had made peace with Batista. After 1938, the party adopted a reformist and openly collaborationist posture, consolidating control over the trade unions and gaining legal status in exchange for political support of the Batista-backed government. Its newspaper was published and distributed publicly, and by the late 1930s the party appeared on the electoral rolls. Communist control over the trade-union movement expanded, culminating in 1939 with the establishment of the Confederación de Trabajadores Cubanos (CTC).

In some measure the restoration of social tranquillity was due to the programs pursued by the new army command. Certainly Batista transformed the Cuban army into an effective apparatus of repression. At the

same time, however, the military leadership practised graft and corruption on a scale previously unknown in Cuba although Batista himself was interested in more than either political power or personal wealth. He committed the armed forces to a wide range of social programmes, starting in 1937 with the inauguration of the civic-military school system, under which sergeants served as schoolmasters throughout the countryside. These *misiones educativas*, designed to disseminate information concerning agriculture, hygiene and nutrition to rural communities, inaugurated a rudimentary education network in the interior. The army operated a thousand schools in which day sessions were devoted to the education of children and evenings to adults. By the late 1930s the army command had created an extensive military bureaucracy assigned exclusively to the administration of social programmes. A Three Year Plan was inaugurated to reform agriculture, education, public health and housing. One important effort of this was to provide the programmatic basis for Batista's direct entry into national politics at the end of the decade.

Economic conditions improved through the 1930s. Gradually Cuban sugar recovered a larger share of the U.S. market, although it would never again attain the prominence it enjoyed during the late 1910s and early 1920s. Under the terms of the Jones-Costigan Act of 1934 the United States lowered the protectionist tariffs on sugar imports, substituting quotas for tariff protection as the means to aid domestic sugar producers. The law empowered the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to determine the annual sugar needs of the nation, whereupon all sugar-producing regions, domestic and foreign, would receive a quota of the total, which was based on the participation of sugar producers in the U.S. market for the years 1931-3. The selection of these years was unfortunate for Cuban producers, for it was precisely this period - the years of Hawley Smoot - in which the Cuban share of the U.S. market was the smallest. Nevertheless, the Cuban participation in the U.S. market increased slightly from 25.4 per cent in 1933 to 31.4 per cent in 1937. These were years, moreover, in which Cuban overall sugar production expanded, and the value of the expanded production increased. Between 1933 and 1938, Cuban sugar output increased from 1.9 million tons to 2.9 million tons, with the corresponding value increasing from 53.7 million pesos to 120.2 million pesos.

This slow economic revival, no less than the slight restoration of the Cuban share of the U.S. market, was not without a price. Under the terms of the new 1934 reciprocity treaty negotiated by the Mendieta govern-

ment, Cuba secured a guaranteed market for its agricultural exports in return for tariff reductions to a large variety of commodity lines and the reduction of internal taxes on U.S. products. Concessions granted by the United States covered thirty-five articles; Cuban concessions affected four hundred items. Tariff reductions granted to Cuban items ranged from 20 per cent to 50 per cent; tariff concessions to U.S. products ranged from 20 per cent to 60 per cent. The new agreement also specified that the enumerated tariff schedule could not be altered as a result of changing money and currency values.

The new treaty certainly contributed to Cuban revival since the country's principal export, sugar, was the item most favored by the 1934 agreement. The U.S. tariff on Cuban raw sugar was reduced from \$1.50 to 90 cents per pound. Reductions were also made on tobacco leaf as well as cigars and cigarettes, honey, fish, products, citrus, pineapples and other agricultural goods. At the same time, however, the 1934 treaty dealt a severe blow to Cuban efforts at economic diversification. Scores of agricultural and manufacturing enterprises, many of which had arisen in the aftermath of the 1927 customs-tariff law, were adversely affected. More broadly, the new treaty allowed U.S. trade adjustment to changing market conditions in Cuba, and ultimately re-established U.S. primacy in the Cuban economy. Cuba was again linked closely to the United States, thereby returning the island to the patterns of pre-depression dependency. The total value of North American imports increased from \$22.6 million in 1933 to \$81 million in 1940; the U.S. portion of Cuban imports for the same period increased from 53.5 per cent to 76.6 per cent.

The renegotiation of the reciprocity treaty was accompanied by the renegotiation of the Permanent Treaty, the legal form of the Platt Amendment. With the exception of provisions for United States use of the Guantánamo naval station, the long-standing affront to Cuban national sensibilities was removed. Henceforth, U.S.-Cuban relations would be conducted formally between 'independent though friendly states'.

By the end of the decade, the passing of the economic crisis and the return of political stability, particularly with acceptance of electoral politics by the Auténticos and the Communist Party, created a climate auspicious for constitutional reform. Batista's political position was firmly established and could only be enhanced by his identifying himself with the demands for reform. Indeed many of the measures enacted by the ill-starred Grau government continued to enjoy considerable national popularity. Further-

more, the old Constitution of 1901 remained permanently stigmatized in Cuba since it contained as an organic part the odious Platt Amendment. Hence, a new constitution promised to make a break with the past and institutionalize the gains of post-Machado Cuba.

A constituent assembly representing the full spectrum of political affiliation, from old *machadistas* to the PRC and Communists, convened in 1939 to draft a new constitution. It provided the forum for renewed debate over virtually all the key issues of republican politics. Nor did political alignments determine the direction of the debates. The pro-government coalition included the discredited Liberals and moribund Unión Nacionalista as well as the Communist Party. The opposition was led by the Auténticos and included the ABC and supporters of former president Miguel Mariano Gómez. Thus, ideology tended to transcend partisan affiliation, left-liberal delegates frequently joining forces to form voting majorities against conservatives, without regard to affiliation with government or opposition blocs. The net result was the promulgation in 1940 of a remarkably progressive constitution which provided for the use of referendum, universal suffrage and free elections and which sanctioned a wide range of political and civil liberties. The charter's social provisions included maximum hours and minimum wages, pensions, workers' compensation, the right to strike and state guarantees against unemployment.

For all its enlightened clauses, the Constitution of 1940 remained substantially a statement of goals, an agenda for future achievement. The absence of provisions for enforcement meant that the new Constitution would remain largely unrealized. At the same time, it soon occupied a place of central importance in national politics since it served alternately as the banner through which to mobilize political support and the standard by which to measure political performance. Many of the objectives of the 1930s found vindication in the new Constitution, which also provided the foundations for legitimacy and consensus politics for the next twelve years. Cuban politics would henceforth turn on partisan promises to interpret most faithfully and implement most vigorously the principal clauses of the Constitution.

The promulgation of the new constitution also set the stage for the celebration of presidential elections in 1940. Batista stepped out of uniform and Grau San Martín returned from exile to challenge his old rival. The campaign was vigorously waged, and the election was certainly among the most honest in the nearly four decades of the republic's history. Batista secured more than 800,000 votes to Grau's 575,000.

The Batista presidency (1940–44) had several salutary effects. Most immediately, it ended the anomalous situation whereby effective political power was transferred from constitutional civil authority to the army chief of staff. The 1940 election served to reinvest the constitutional office of the presidency with the power and prestige that had accrued to Batista personally. The demands on Batista the president were no longer the same as the demands on Batista the army chief. He had acquired a larger constituency and accumulated debts to the political coalition that had carried him into office. Batista now presided over the return of patronage and political appointment to the presidential palace. In early 1941 custom-houses, long a source of military graft, were transferred to the Ministry of the Treasury. Army-sponsored education projects passed under the authority of the Ministry of Education. Supervision over lighthouses, maritime police, merchant marine and the postal system returned to appropriate government ministries.

These developments came as a rude jolt to the old *septembrista* command, long accustomed to the exercise of more or less unchecked authority. Many officers viewed the Batista presidency with great expectation, as a logical conclusion to a decade of army pre-eminence. The transfer of army perquisites to civil authority, therefore, quickly aroused the ire of the senior *septembrista* officers and military confidence in Batista declined. Friction between Camp Columbia and the presidential palace increased, and in early 1941 erupted into a short-lived revolt of senior officers. The collapse of the army plot raised presidential authority to a new high. Scores of *septembrista* officers was retired; others received new assignments abroad. A year later the size of the army was reduced and budget allocations cut. By the end of his term, Batista had restored constitutional balance of power and re-established civilian control over the armed forces.

Batista had also the good fortune of serving as a wartime president. Cuba's entry into the war in December 1941 served to facilitate trade agreements and loan and credit programs with the United States. The decline of sugar production in war-torn Asia and Europe spurred Cuban producers. Between 1940 and 1944 the Cuban crop increased from 2.7 million tons to 4.2 million tons, the largest harvest since 1930. The value of Cuban raw sugar production for the same period also increased, from 110 million pesos to 251 million pesos. Cuba was also the beneficiary of several important trade deals with the United States. In 1941 both countries signed a lend-lease agreement whereby Cuba received arms shipments in exchange for U.S. use of Cuban military facilities. In

the same year, the United States agreed to purchase the full 1942 sugar crop at 2.65 cents per pound. A second agreement similarly disposed of the 1943 crop. With the continued revival of sugar production, the economy moved out of a state of lethargy, public works programmes expanded and prosperity returned.

The war was not an unmixed blessing. Prices increased and shortages of all kinds became commonplace. The lack of shipping and risks of transporting goods across the Atlantic severely restricted Cuban trade with Europe. Cuban cigar-manufacturers lost the luxury markets of Europe, and no amount of increase in the export of tobacco leaf to the United States could compensate for this. Tourism registered a marked decrease, the number of travellers falling from 127,000 in 1940 to 12,000 in 1943. As a result, there was sufficient dissatisfaction to generate a lively political debate in 1944, when presidential elections was scheduled. The government candidate, Carlos Saladrigas, campaigned with the active support of Batista. He was opposed by Ramón Grau San Martín in a spirited campaign with Saladrigas extolling the Batista administration and Grau recalling nostalgically his one hundred days of power in 1933. Indeed, the mystique of Grau as well as the appeal of the *Auténticos* was primarily derived from those heady and exalted days of 1933. In 1944, Grau promised more of the same, and an expectant electorate responded. In the June poll Grau obtained more than one million votes, sweeping five out of six provinces, losing only Pinar del Río. After more than a decade of unsuccessful bids for political power, Grau San Martín and the *Auténticos* had finally won a presidential election.

The *Auténtico* victory raised enormous popular expectations in the reform program that had served as both the legacy and promise of the PRC. However, neither the Grau government (1944–48) nor his successor Carlos Prío Socarrás (1948–52) was able to meet Cuban expectations. The *Auténticos* had spent the better part of their political lives as victims of persecution, imprisonment and forced exile. From the earliest political stirrings against Machado in the 1920s, through the revolutionary tumult of the 1930s and the disappointing electoral set-backs of the early 1940s, the first republican-born generation had been banished to a political wilderness. Their debut in Cuban politics had been as inglorious as it was impoverishing. By the mid-1940s, idealism had given way to cynicism, and public office no longer offered the opportunity for collective improvement as much as it provided the occasion for individual enrichment. Government fell under a siege of new hungry office-seekers, and their

appetite was voracious. For the first time, Auténticos acquired control over the disposal of lucrative posts and privileges. Embezzlement, graft, corruption and malfeasance of public office permeated every branch of national, provincial and municipal government. Political competition became a fierce struggle to win positions of wealth. Politics passed under the control of party thugs, and a new word entered the Cuban political lexicon: *gangsterismo*. Violence and terror became extensions of party politics and the hallmark of Auténtico rule.

The number of persons on the government payroll more than doubled in size, from 60,000 in 1943 to 131,000 in 1949. By 1950, some 186,000 persons, 11 per cent of the work force, occupied active public positions at national, provincial and municipal levels of government; another 30,000 retired employees were on the state payrolls. An estimated 80 per cent of the 1950 budget was used to pay the salaries of public officials. Pensions accounted for another 8 per cent of national expenditures. The Auténticos responded to their electoral success with considerable uncertainty, fearful that their tenure would be brief and their rule temporary. These circumstances served to distinguish PRC corruption from the practices of its predecessor, emphasis being given to immediate returns and spectacular graft. Grau was accused of having embezzled \$174 million. The outgoing Minister of Education in 1948 was believed to have stolen \$20 million. The Minister of Finance in the Prío government was accused of misappropriating millions of old bank notes scheduled for destruction.

That these conditions prevailed, and indeed so permeated the institutional fabric of the republic during the Auténtico years, was in no small way a result of the post-war prosperity enjoyed by the Cuban economy. The economies of sugar-cane producers in Asia and beet-growers in Europe were in ruin. During World War II world sugar production declined by almost 60 per cent, from a combined cane and beet production of 28.6 million tons in 1940 to 18.1 million tons, and it was not until 1950 that world production overtook pre-war levels. As world production fell and prices rose the opportunities for Cuban producers were palpable. This boom never quite reached the proportions of the 'dance of the millions' following the First World War, but it certainly produced a level of prosperity not known since those years. Between 1943 and 1948, Cuban sugar production increased almost 50 per cent, from 2.8 million tons to 5.8 million tons. By 1948, sugar had come to constitute a high of 90 per cent of the island's total export value.

Good times came to Cuba in dramatic form. Sugar exports accounted for a nearly 40 per cent increase in national income between 1939 and 1947. Record sugar exports and simultaneous import scarcities caused by the war produced a large balance-of-payments surplus, averaging more than \$120 million annually between 1943 and 1947. Domestic industrial and commercial activity increased over the decade while government revenues from taxation rose from \$75.7 million in fiscal year 1937-8 to \$244.3 million in 1949-50. Food prices increased almost threefold between 1939 and 1948 and the cost of living rose more than twofold. Inflation would have been more acute if it had not been for the wartime import scarcities and the willingness of many individuals and institutions to keep the better part of the savings in idle balances. The money supply increased 500 per cent between 1939 and 1950 while the cost of living rose only 145 per cent. Over roughly the same period the dollar, gold and silver holdings of the national treasury rose from \$25 million to \$402 million; the net balance abroad from \$6 million to more than \$200 million; and the public's dollar holding from \$14 million to \$205 million.

Post-war economic opportunities were squandered not only by corruption and graft but also by mismanagement and miscalculation. Few structural changes were made in the economy, the chronic problems of unemployment-under-employment and a weak agrarian order remaining unaltered. The economy began to decline by the late 1940s, and only a temporary reprieve provided by a rise in the price of sugar occasioned by the Korean War delayed the inevitable crisis. The problem of inflation increased and capital generated by the post-war prosperity war either invested abroad or mismanaged at home. 'Much of the savings of Cubans', the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development reported of these years, 'has gone abroad, been hoarded or used for real estate construction and for speculation'.⁹ Between 1946 and 1952 the Cuban gross fixed investment as a percentage of gross income was only 9.3 per cent (in Argentina it reached 18.7 per cent, in Brazil 15.7 per cent and in Mexico 13.4 per cent).

Of course, these developments were not entirely new. They had long been associated with the boom-or-bust mentality of the Cuban sugar economy. But in the late 1940s and early 1950s such conditions had far-reaching implications. The fact that sugar continued to dominate the Cuban economy persuaded potential investors to retain large portions of

⁹ International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, *Report on Cuba* (Baltimore, 1951), p. 7.

their assets in liquid form. It contributed to fostering the desire for quick profits and it discouraged new investments and economic diversification. Cuba continued to depend upon an export product in which competition was especially intense, the decline of rival producers as a result of the war engendering a false sense of security. In fact, the economy was not growing fast enough to accommodate the estimated annual 25,000 new jobs required to meet the growing numbers of people entering the labour market. These problems would have challenged even the most enlightened administration. They were historical and structural, and defied easy solution. The Auténticos, however, were far from enlightened. These were years that began with great hope and ended with disappointment and disillusionment.

At the same time, conditions were generally difficult for the Communist Party, now renamed the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP). Collaboration with Batista had gained the party access to the cabinet, and in the 1944 elections the PSP obtained three seats in the Senate and ten in the lower house. By the 1948 elections the party could claim some 160,000 supporters. But PSP fortunes declined markedly during the Auténtico years. The Cold War undermined PSP influence, and the Auténticos lost no opportunity to expand their power. They moved against the Communist-controlled trade unions and by the late 1940s had established PRC control over key labour organizations. The government confiscated the PSP radio station and continually harassed the party newspaper. But even as PSP influence declined, the party remained an effective political force.

The apparent indifference with which the PRC leadership viewed the historical mandate of 1933 and the electoral triumph of 1944 created dissent and tension within the party. By 1947, PRC misgovernment resulted in an open rupture when Eduardo Chibás, a prominent student leader in 1933, broke with the Auténticos and organized the Partido del Pueblo Cubano (Ortodoxo). In claiming to uphold the ideals of the 1930s, the Ortodoxos became generally associated in the popular imagination with economic independence, political freedom, social justice and public honesty. Perhaps the most gifted orator of the era, Chibás articulated public grievances and crystallized popular discontent against the incumbent Auténticos in a campaign that thrived on spectacular accusations and disclosures of high level government corruption. Chibás contributed powerfully to a final discrediting of the Auténtico administration, undermining what little remained of public confidence in government leadership. However, Chibás' suicide in 1951 produced instead mass disillusionment,

resignation and indifference despite the fact that the Prío government remained substantially weaker after its three-year bout with the fallen Ortodoxo leader. Thoroughly disgraced, politically weak, morally bankrupt, the Auténticos presided over a discredited government and a demoralized body politic.

Batista would later derive enormous satisfaction in recounting the details of his return to power in 1952. Within one hour and seventeen minutes, he boasted, the military conspirators overturned the Auténtico government. And, indeed, the *cuartelazo* of 10 March unquestionably owed much of its success to the organizational prowess of its planners. At 2:40 A.M. the rebels seized all the capital's principal army posts, from which military units moved into the city to garrison strategic positions. Bus and rail stations, airports, docks, electricity plants, radio transmitters, banks and offices of government ministries passed into army control. Later that morning city residents awoke amid rumours of a coup and turning to radio broadcasts heard only uninterrupted music. Telecommunication service to the interior was interrupted. Sites of potential protest demonstrations against the coup passed under military control. The university and opposition press offices were closed. Local headquarters of various unions and the Communist Party were occupied, and leading activists arrested. Constitutional guarantees were suspended.

The ease with which Batista and the army executed the plot and consolidated power, however, reflected considerably more than adroit application of conspiratorial talents. The effects of nearly a decade of graft, corruption and scandal at all levels of civilian government had more than adequately paved the way for the return of military rule in 1952. The *cuartelazo* simply delivered the coup de grâce to a moribund regime. Indeed, general indifference to the coup underscored the depth of national cynicism with politics. The discredited Auténtico government possessed neither the popular confidence nor the moral credibility to justify an appeal for popular support; its overthrow simply did not warrant public outrage. On the contrary, for many the coup was a long-overdue change. To business and commerce Batista pledged order, stability and labour tranquillity. To the United States he promised respect for foreign capital. To political parties he promised new elections in 1954.

The Auténtico and Ortodoxo parties proved incapable of responding effectively to Batista's seizure of power. The Ortodoxos were leaderless and the Auténticos could not lead. After 1952 Cuba's two principal parties

became irrelevant to a solution of the political crisis. In much the same way that the crisis of the 1930s had brought about the downfall of the traditional parties, events in the 1950s contributed to the demise of the Auténticos and Ortodoxos. Both parties, to be sure, duly condemned the violation of the 1940 Constitution, but neither party responded to the army usurpation with either a comprehensive program or compelling plan of action. The little opposition that did arise originated largely outside the organized political parties, principally from ousted military officers, splinter political groups and personalistic factions of the major parties. Once again, however, a new generation of Cubans responded to the summons and filled the political vacuum.

The early challenges to the *batistato* failed, and failed without much fanfare. An abortive plot, the routine arrest of café conspirators, the quiet retirement of dissident army officers, were not the stuff to arouse the national conscience or inspire national resistance. The attack on Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba led by Fidel Castro in July 1953 also failed, but it was the dimension of its failure that distinguished it from its ill-starred predecessors: the plan was as daring as its failure was spectacular. It served to catapult Castro into contention for leadership over the anti-Batista forces and elevated armed struggle as the principal means of opposition in the mid-1950s.

The much anticipated elections of 1954 offended all but the most cynical *batistianos*. The major political parties in the end refused to participate and the leading opposition candidate withdrew. Running unopposed, obtaining a majority of the mere 40 per cent of the electorate that voted, Batista won a new term of office. After 1954 those moderate political forces that had counted on elections to settle national tensions found themselves isolated and without alternatives. One last effort to negotiate a political settlement of the deepening crisis occurred in 1955 when representatives of the moderate opposition arranged a series of conferences with Batista. The Civic Dialogue, as the discussions became known, sought to secure from the President the promise of new elections with guarantees for all participants. He refused. The stage was now set for armed confrontation.

The first response was not long in coming. Late in 1955 student demonstrations resulted in armed clashes with the army and police, and the repression which followed persuaded student leaders of the necessity to organize a clandestine revolutionary movement, the Directorio Revolucionario. A year later, an insurgent group of Auténticos took up arms and

attacked the Goicuría army barracks in Matanzas. In 1957, after an unsuccessful assassination attempt against Batista, the Directorio Revolucionario also turned to rural insurgency and organized a guerrilla front in Las Villas province known as the II Frente Nacional del Escambray. It was, however, in the Sierra Maestra mountains of Oriente province that the fate of the Batista regime was being determined.

Within three years of the attack on Moncada, Fidel Castro had organized another uprising in Santiago timed with his return from Mexico aboard the small yacht *Granma*, but the revolt of 30 November 1956 was crushed well before the *Granma* crew set foot on Cuban soil. Moreover, alerted to the arrival of the expeditionaries, government forces overwhelmed the landing party at Alegría de Pío in southern Oriente, reducing the force of some eighty men to a band of eighteen. Having failed in a dramatic bid for power, deprived of arms, ammunition and supplies, the *Granma* survivors sought refuge in the southeastern mountain range.

The character of the guerrilla campaign which followed conformed to the geopolitical setting of the Sierra Maestra. Castro and his men commenced operations in a peripheral region of the island where the politico-military presence of the government they were committed to overthrowing amounted to no more than isolated Rural Guard outposts. In waging war against the Rural Guard, however, the rebels attacked both the local power-base of the Batista regime and the symbolic expression of Havana's presence in the Sierra Maestra region. For decades, Rural Guard commanders arbitrarily terrorized rural communities. Hence, however modest rebel successes against the rural constabulary may have seemed, they did pose a serious challenge to Havana's politico-military authority in Oriente province.

The group of *Granma* survivors attracted early recruits from the mountain population, and with this slightly augmented force the insurgents mounted their early offensives. By January 1957, the rebel force was sufficiently strong to overpower the Rural Guard post at La Plata; in a second action in May 1957 the guerrillas defeated the Rural Guard station at El Uvero. News of insurgent victories kept Cubans alive to the struggle unfolding in the Sierra Maestra and attracted new recruits to the guerrilla camp. Rebel operations also forced government forces to leave the security of the cities to give chase to the rural insurgents. In the process the arbitrary manner in which the government conducted field operations served further to alienate the rural population and generate additional support for the guerrilla force.

Insurgent victories forced the government to concede enclaves of liberated territory throughout Oriente. Throughout 1957 and early 1958 the size of the rebel army increased and field operations expanded. By mid-1958, a fifty-man column under Raúl Castro had established the Second Front in northeastern Cuba, consolidating several rebel bands operating in the region. A column of some thirty-five men under Juan Almeida subsequently opened another front in the area around Santiago de Cuba and likewise succeeded in consolidating and augmenting insurgent forces. In April 1958, Camilo Cienfuegos left the Sierra stronghold with a small patrol of eight or ten men. Still another column under Ernesto Che Guevara operated east of Turquino peak.

The expanding struggle in the countryside was accompanied by growing resistance in the cities. Urban underground groups, most notably the Civic Resistance movement, coordinated acts of sabotage and terror in Cuba's principal cities. As kidnappings and assassinations increased the regime responded with increasing ferocity, which served to increase its isolation.

Anti-government opposition was not confined to civilian political groups. By the mid-1950s dissension had become rife within the armed forces. Batista's return to power had signalled the wholesale transformation of the army command, old *septembrista* officers, many of whom had retired in the previous years of Auténtico rule, returning to positions of command. Political credentials and nepotism governed promotions and commands in the early 1950s, Batista virtually dismantling the professional officer corps. The return of *septembrista* officers produced widespread demoralization among younger commanders who were proud of their academy training and took umbrage at appointments that made a mockery of professional standards and placed the old sergeants in positions of command.

In April 1956 the first of a series of army conspiracies jolted the government. The plot led by Colonel Ramón Barquín implicated more than two hundred officers, including the most distinguished field commanders of the army. In the subsequent reorganization some four thousand officers and men were removed, reassigned and retired. In September 1957 another conspiracy resulted in a mutiny at the Cienfuegos naval station that was part of a larger plot involving the principal naval installations across the island. In the same year conspiracies were uncovered in the air force, the army medical corps and the national police. By the late 1950s, then, Batista was facing both mounting popular opposition and

armed resistance with an army that was increasingly politically uncertain and professionally unreliable.

The Cuban crisis during the 1950s went far beyond a conflict between Batista and his political opponents. Many participants in the anti-Batista struggle certainly defined the conflict principally in political terms, a struggle in which the central issues turned wholly on the elimination of the iniquitous Batista and the restoration of the Constitution of 1940. But discontent during the decade was as much a function of socio-economic frustration as it was the result of political grievances. By the 1950s sugar had ceased to be a source of economic growth and lacked the capacity to sustain continued economic development. Yet all sectors of the Cuban economy remained vulnerable to the effects of price fluctuations in the international sugar market. The decline in sugar prices between 1952 and 1954 precipitated the first in a series of recessions in the Cuban economy in the course of the decade. At the same time the effects of the reciprocity treaty of 1934 had taken their toll, impeding in Cuba the industrial development characteristic of other Latin American countries during the post-war period. Such local industry which did exist had to face strong foreign competition with little or no tariff protection and there was little incentive to expand manufactures beyond light consumer goods, largely food and textiles. With the Cuban population expanding at an annual rate of 2.5 per cent, and 50,000 young men alone reaching working age every year, only 8,000 new jobs were created in industry between 1955 and 1958.

Investment patterns were at once a cause and effect of these conditions. Investment in industry did not keep up with the availability of domestic savings. At the same time considerable sums of capital were transferred abroad, principally in the form of profits on foreign investments in Cuba and through Cuban investments outside the island. Few Cubans invested in government securities or long-term stocks, preferring liquidity, principally in short-term funds in banks abroad or safety-deposit boxes at home. The few long-term investments made were principally in U.S. stocks. By 1955 investment in real estate exceeded \$150 million, most of it in southern Florida. In contrast, U.S. capital controlled 90 per cent of the telephone and electricity services in Cuba, 50 per cent of railroads and 40 per cent of sugar production. Cuban branches of U.S. banks held 25 per cent of all bank deposits. Indeed direct U.S. investment in Cuba, which had declined during the depression, expanded steadily after the Second

World War, reaching a peak of \$1 billion (\$386 million in services, \$270 million in petroleum and mining, \$265 million in agriculture and \$80 million in manufacturing) in 1958.

Not only did labour's share of net income decline during the 1950s – for example, from 70.5 per cent of 66.4 per cent between 1953 and 1954 – but unemployment and under-employment increased. By 1957, the best year during the middle 1950s, 17 per cent of the labour force was generally classified as unemployed, while another 13 per cent had been reduced to under-employment. In the sugar industry, one of the principal sources of employment for Cuban labour – it employed an estimated 475,000 workers, approximately 25 per cent of the labour force – some 60 per cent of the workers were employed for six months or less, with only 30 per cent employed for more than ten months. The average sugar-worker was employed for less than one hundred days of the year. As unemployment increased so, too, did resistance to measures raising productivity. Sugar-workers successfully opposed mechanized cutting and bulk loading, cigar-workers were able to limit mechanization and dock-workers put up fierce resistance to it. Successive labour laws through the 1940s and 1950s all but made the dismissal of workers impossible and job security became an issue of paramount importance. One result of all this was to reduce further the ability of Cuban exports to compete successfully in international markets.

Significant distinctions existed within the Cuban labour force. Agricultural workers typically earned less than 80 pesos a month, which compared unfavourably with an average industrial wage of approximately 120 pesos a month plus pension allowances and other fringe benefits, particularly if a worker was employed by a major company or belonged to a strong union organization. Moreover, rural Cuba enjoyed few of the amenities and services that had come to characterize life in the island's cities. On the contrary, the one-third of the population which lived in the countryside suffered abject poverty and persistent neglect. Only 15 per cent of rural inhabitants possessed running water as compared with 80 per cent of the urban population. Only 9 per cent of rural homes enjoyed electricity as compared with 83 per cent of the urban population. Medical and dental personnel as well as hospitals and clinics tended to concentrate in the cities while a combination of poverty and isolation served to exclude the countryside from virtually all access to educational services. The national illiteracy rate of 20 per cent concealed that of 40 per cent in the countryside while in Oriente province it was more than 50 per cent. The peasantry lived at the

margins of society and outside the body politic. Nor were these conditions likely to change soon. Vast areas of rural Cuba were held in latifundia farms. Twenty-two large sugar companies operated one-fifth of the agricultural land, much of this in reserve for the prospective periodic boom that planters so eagerly awaited. Cattle ranches also accounted for vast acreage, from which large numbers of peasants were excluded as either workers or owners.

By the mid-1950s even the Cuban urban middle class felt itself in crisis. To be sure, Cuba enjoyed one of the highest per capita incomes in Latin America (\$374), ranked in 1957 second after Venezuela (\$857). Only Mexico and Brazil exceeded Cuba in the number of radios and televisions per one thousand inhabitants. The country ranked first in telephones, newspapers, and passenger motor vehicles. Daily average food consumption was surpassed only by Argentina and Uruguay. Consumption of foreign imports, principally U.S. products, increased from \$515 million in 1950 to \$649 million in 1956 and \$777 million in 1958. Middle-class Cubans, however, found little personal comfort in statistical tallies that touted their high level of material consumption and placed the island near the top of the scale of per capita incomes in Latin America. The United States, not Latin America, was the Cuban frame of reference. Cubans participated directly in and depended entirely on the United States economic system in much the same fashion as U.S. citizens, but without access to U.S. social service programmes and at employment and wages levels substantially lower than their North American counterparts. The Cuban per capita income of \$374 paled against the United States per capita of \$2,000, or even that of Mississippi, the poorest state, at \$1,000. (And in 1956 Havana ranked among the world's most expensive cities – fourth after Caracas, Ankara and Manila.) This disparity was the source of much frustration, particularly as middle-class Cubans perceived their standard of living fall behind the income advances in the United States. Per capita income in Cuba actually declined by 18 per cent, for example, during the recession of 1952–4, neutralizing the slow gains enjoyed during the immediate post-war period. In 1958, Cuban per capita income was at about the same level as it had been in 1947. By the late fifties middle-class Cubans, initially deposed to support Batista, were in many ways worse off than they had been in the twenties.

Batista's continued presence in power compounded the growing crisis by creating political conditions that made renewed economic growth impossible. As the International Commission of Jurists later concluded,

administrative dishonesty and political illegality' were in 1958 the most important obstacles to economic development.¹⁰ Political instability and conflict were playing havoc with the economy. After the short boom between 1955 and 1957 tourism was once again in decline, and the insurgency was halting the flow of dairy, vegetable and meat supplies from the countryside to the cities. Shortages caused the prices of basic staples to soar while sabotage and the destruction of property further contributed to economic dislocation. Sugar production dropped. Indeed, by 1958 the insurgency had reached its most advanced stage in the three eastern provinces that accounted for more than 80 per cent of the total sugar land and more than 75 per cent of the annual crop. Shortages of gasoline and oil brought railroads, trucking and sugar mills to a standstill. It was in 1958 that the 26 of July Movement opened a war against property and production across the island as a means to isolate Batista from the support of economic elites, both foreign and domestic. The message was clear: conditions of normality would not return until Batista departed. In February the guerrilla leadership announced its intention to attack sugar mills, tobacco factories, public utilities, railroads and oil refineries. The destruction of the sugar harvest in particular emerged as the principal goal of insurgent strategy. 'Either Batista without the *zafra* or the *zafra* without Batista', the 26 of July intoned again and again. In March the rebel army command reported having applied a torch to every cane-producing province on the island, destroying an estimated 2 million tons of sugar. As early as September 1957, the resident *New York Times* correspondent in Havana cabled that commerce, industry and capital, 'which have wholeheartedly supported President Batista since he took over the Government in 1952, are growing impatient with the continued violence in the island'.¹¹ By 1958, this impatience had turned to exasperation.

Cuba was on the verge of revolution through most of 1958. In July representatives of the leading opposition groups met in Caracas to organize a united front and develop a common strategy against Batista. The Pact of Caracas established Fidel Castro as the principal leader of the anti-Batista movement and the rebel army as main arm of the revolution. As the conference in Caracas convened, Batista launched his most formidable offensive against the guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra. Every branch of the armed forces participated in the offensive, an estimated 12,000 troops

¹⁰ International Commission of Jurists, *Cuba and the Rule of Law* (Geneva, 1962), p. 25.

¹¹ *New York Times*, September 15, 1957, 4, p. 11.

moving on the Sierra Maestra. Air force squadrons bombed and strafed suspected rebel-held regions while naval off-shore units pounded the south-eastern mountain range. But by the end of the summer the government offensive collapsed, signaling the beginning of the disintegration of the Cuban armed forces. The army simply ceased to fight as desertions and defections reached epidemic proportions. Retreating army units became easy prey for advancing guerrilla columns. Demoralization turned to fear and, ultimately, panic.

The guerrillas launched their counter-offensive in late summer. Within weeks government forces in the eastern half of the island found themselves engulfed by the swelling tide of the armed opposition, isolated from relief and reinforcements as provincial towns and cities fell to guerrilla columns. Local military commands surrendered, often without firing a shot. Loyal troops sought desperately to return west in advance of the revolutionary current that moved inexorably toward Havana from the east.

Two things were now clear; the Batista regime was doomed, and the 26 of July movement under Fidel Castro had established clear hegemony over all the revolutionary factions. In the summer, only months before the fall of the regime, the Communist PSP, which had been proscribed during the second Batista government, had allied itself with the 26 of July Movement. This conversion to Fidelismo won the party several key positions within the 26 of July, most notably within the rebel army columns of Raúl Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara, positions later to serve as the basis of expanding PSP authority in post-revolutionary Cuba.

By 1958, Batista had acquired one more adversary: the United States government. The year began inauspiciously for the Cuban government when, in March, Washington imposed an arms embargo, a move tantamount to the withdrawal of support. The suspension of arms shipments contributed to weakening Batista's hold over his supporters, both civil and military, especially since it was declared on the eve of the government's spring offensive. For the better part of the 1950s, Batista had retained army loyalty with assurances that he enjoyed unqualified support from Washington. After March 1958, the army command was no longer sure. According to U.S. ambassador Earl E. T. Smith, intimations that Washington no longer backed Batista, had 'a devastating psychological effect' on the army and was 'the most effective step taken by the Department of State in bringing about the downfall of Batista'.¹²

¹² Earl E. T. Smith, *The Fourth Floor* (New York, 1962), pp. 48, 107.

The year 1958 was also an election year, providing Batista with an opportunity to demonstrate to Washington that democratic processes were still capable of functioning, civil war notwithstanding. But to the surprise of few, government candidate Andrés Rivero Agüero triumphed, the electoral hoax further weakening Batista's position both at home and abroad. The victory of the official candidate disillusioned the few who still hoped for a political end to the armed insurrection. Army officers personally loyal to Batista, disheartened by the prospect of a transfer of executive power, lost their enthusiasm to defend a leader already replaced at the polls. Washington rejected outright the rigged presidential succession and announced in advance plans to withhold diplomatic recognition of Rivero Agüero, which undermined political and military support for the regime.

In fact, Washington had already determined to ease Batista out of office. The crisis in 1958 recalled that of 1933 in that the incumbency of an unpopular president threatened to plunge the island into political turmoil and social upheaval. Once again Washington sought to remove the source of Cuban tensions as a means to defuse the revolutionary situation. In early December the State Department dispatched financier William D. Pawley to Havana to undertake a covert mission. The United States, Pawley later recalled, urged Batista 'to capitulate to a caretaker government unfriendly to him, but satisfactory to us, whom we could immediately recognize and give military assistance to in order that Fidel Castro not come to power'. On December 9 Pawley held a three-hour conference with Batista, offering him an opportunity to retire unmolested in Florida with his family. The U.S. envoy informed the President that the United States 'would make an effort to stop Fidel Castro from coming into power as a Communist, but that the caretaker government would be men who were enemies of his, otherwise it would not work anyway, and Fidel Castro would otherwise have to lay down his arms or admit he was a revolutionary fighting against everybody only because he wanted power, not because he was against Batista'.¹³ Batista refused.

Even as the United States sought to persuade Batista to leave office, the revolutionary momentum had sealed the fate of the regime. The failure of the government offensive and the success of the guerrilla counter-offensive had a galvanizing effect on Cubans, provoking spontaneous uprisings

¹³ United States Congress, Senate, *Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary: Communist Threat to the United States Through the Caribbean*, 86th Cong., 2d Sess. (Washington, D.C., 1959-60), pt. 10, p. 739.

across the island. Large amounts of arms and equipment fell into the control of civilians in the wake of the army retreat, including artillery, tanks and small arms of every type. In the closing weeks of 1958, both the ranks of the urban resistance and the guerrilla columns increased rapidly. By December 1958 the Batistiano army command in Santiago reported that 90 per cent of the population supported guerrilla actions. At about the same time, spontaneous uprisings in Camagüey overwhelmed local army detachments. In the decisive battle of Santa Clara, Guevara's column received decisive assistance from the local population. At the time of the government's summer offensive the guerrillas numbered some 5,000 officers and troops. By January 1959, the rebel army numbered some 50,000.

Batista's expendability was the signal for military intrigue. The army that had ceased to fight in the countryside had become the focal point of political intrigue in the cities. By December no fewer than half a dozen conspiracies were developing in the armed forces. During the early hours of 1 January 1959, as guerrilla columns marched across the plains of central Cuba, General Eulogio Cantillo seized power and appointed Supreme Court Justice Carlos Piedra as provisional president. The 26 of July Movement rejected the coup and demanded unconditional surrender to the rebel army. Pledging to continue the armed struggle, Fidel Castro called for a nationwide general strike.

With the news of Batista's flight, army units throughout the island simply ceased to resist further rebel advances. Cantillo complained to the U.S. embassy that he had inherited the command of a 'dead army'. Seeking to revive the moribund war effort, Cantillo summoned the imprisoned Colonel Ramón Barquín and relinquished to him command of the army. Barquín ordered an immediate cease-fire, saluted the insurgent 'Army of Liberation', and surrendered command of Camp Columbia and La Cabaña military fortress to Ernesto 'Che' Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos. A week later Fidel Castro arrived in Havana.