




WORKING FOR THE REVOLUTION

 Martí had many things with which to occupy himself during his early years in New York, but he never forgot the cause for which he had decided to devote his life. In 1884, he was given the chance to renew his efforts for Cuban independence.

General Máximo Gómez, one of the heroes of the Ten Years War, was furious at the way the Treaty of Zanjón had been all but ignored by the Spanish government. He decided to gather his forces together to renew the military struggle against Spain. He journeyed from his home in

Santo Domingo to Honduras to meet with Antonio Maceo, the courageous general who had refused to acknowledge the end of the war. The two of them communicated with Cuban exiles and émigrés in the United States and learned that the revolutionary spirit still existed there. Together, they journeyed to New York to meet with members of the Cuban communities with the aim of raising funds to support an invasion of the island.

Martí had earlier written to the two generals to introduce himself and to convince them that the revolution had not died and that he was eager to pursue its goals. Gómez and Maceo met with Martí and were impressed with the young man's devotion to the Cuban cause. Gómez appointed Maceo and Martí heads of a mission to visit Cuban communities in the United States to raise funds for the coming struggle, but when Martí outlined some of his plans for the financing and conduct of the invasion, Gómez rebuked him, telling him to follow orders and let Maceo take care of the planning. This made Martí, who was already distrustful of the military, wary of Gómez and Maceo. He felt that they considered the revolution their own personal property and were not likely to put any postwar government in the hands of civilians.

Consequently, on October 20, 1884, Martí resigned from the movement. He gave as his





José Martí and General Máximo Gómez met in New York in 1884 to discuss the aims of the Cuban Revolutionary Party.

reason that he could not see the point of “planning to plunge a nation into war only to take possession of that nation at some later date.”¹ From that date on, Martí was totally opposed to any form of military government for Cuba.

In 1889, Martí turned to rallying his fellow exiles against the possible takeover of Cuba by the United States. James G. Blaine, U.S. secretary of state under President Benjamin Harrison, saw Cuba as a valuable addition to United States territory. It was a ready supplier of sugar, and its position in the Caribbean Sea made it a valuable stronghold for defense of Central America and Mexico. There was also talk of building a canal across Panama to connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Such a canal would make Cuba’s position in the Caribbean Sea even more important as a defensive position. Members of Congress were predicting that in the near future the United States would possess the whole of the North American continent, from Canada to Central America. Martí had seen what happened to the United States as a result of the freeing of its slaves, a flood of immigrants, and the rise of big business. He feared that Cuba, with its large slave and freed-slave population, would fall victim to the intolerance and bigotry that had overtaken the United States. Also, with its economy based on a single



resource, sugar, Cuba would be easy prey for the large corporations then gobbling up all the resources of the United States.

Not everyone in the United States was in favor of annexing Cuba, and for the worst reasons. In 1889, *The Philadelphia Manufacturer* published an editorial in which it asked, "Do We Want Cuba?" It argued that the island's population of impoverished Cuban Criollos, corrupt Spaniards, and freed slaves was not capable of functioning in a government such as that of the United States. To give such people the same elective power as "the freemen of our Northern States would be to summon them to the performance of functions for which they have not the slightest capacity."² In other words, they were inferior.

Martí, quick to react to this insult, wrote a forceful reply, "Vindication of Cuba," which was published in *The New York Evening Post*. In it, he defended Cuban culture as the product of a civilized and knowledgeable society. He also cited the bravery of the Cuban population in rebelling against a corrupt and unjust system as an indication of a political awareness equal to that of the average citizen of the United States. He went so far as to say that no Cuban would agree to become part of a country so self-centered and so confident of its superiority.³ Martí made plans to



publish a newspaper, written in English, which would answer any future slurs against his country. He wrote, "What I want is to demonstrate that we are good people, industrious and capable."⁴

This affair served to renew Martí's activity in the independence movement. From October 1889 to April 1890, the first Pan-American Conference was held in Washington, D.C. This was dominated by Secretary of State James G. Blaine, who tried to convince Latin American countries to open their borders to American commerce and investment. Martí saw it as one more attempt by the United States to increase its influence in Latin America. Martí made a speech in which he urged the delegates to declare their "second independence," this time from the United States.⁵

In 1891, Martí attended the Inter-American Monetary Conference as the Uruguayan delegate. The United States used the conference to again try to open up Latin America to its economic interests and to back all American currencies with both silver and gold. Until then, most currencies in the Western Hemisphere were backed by gold, but silver-producing nations such as the United States, Mexico, and Peru urged that silver be given an equal status with gold. Martí again made a speech in which he pointed out that since most Central and South American countries produced little or



no silver, the new standard would not do them any good and, indeed, might weaken their currencies. The proposal was turned down by the delegates, and Martí was given credit for defeating the designs of the U.S. Department of State.

Martí's prominent place in all of these negotiations led to complaints in diplomatic circles. It was pointed out that it was hardly proper for a Cuban revolutionary to represent another country at an international conference. Martí heard of this and resigned from all of his diplomatic positions. From this point on, he devoted himself exclusively to the struggle for Cuban independence.

Martí now decided to take the lead in the independence movement. He allied himself with the African-Cuban segments of the émigré community by helping them establish an educational institution, *La Liga* (The League), for African Cubans. He knew that he would have to have the support of African Cubans and the poor farmers and laborers, who formed the majority of the Cuban population. Working-class Cuban émigrés were found mostly in Florida, and they worked in the Cuban-owned cigar factories of Tampa and Key West. Florida had always been the center of Cuban settlement in the United States for an obvious reason: It was only ninety miles from the Cuban mainland.



From 1887 until 1895, Martí met with any group that would lend support and money for the revolutionary cause. Here he poses with a group of wealthy Cuban émigré businessmen in Florida.

The Cuban cigar-making industry, quite liberal for the times, provided good working conditions and services, such as reading rooms and meeting places, for employees. The factories employed people whose only duty was to read aloud from newspapers and periodicals while the cigar rollers worked at their humdrum tasks. The reading material dealt mostly with news of the war for

independence, the political scene in Cuba, and articles on cultural and social affairs. Since Martí was the number one contributor to such periodicals, his name was known to practically every Cuban in Florida.

In November of 1891, Martí was in Tampa, Florida. He was there at the invitation of a Cuban patriotic club to deliver an address to the members. On November 26, Martí made his famous "Liceo" speech, named after the Cuban Lyceum, the building where the meeting was held. In this speech, Martí outlined his vision of what Cuba could be, a land of racial harmony and justice for all. He said that "Cuba must be taken as an altar, to offer our lives on it." His motto was the title of the speech: "Everyone Together and for the Well-Being of All."⁶ At the end of the speech, the audience rushed the stage and swamped him with hugs and handshakes. They put him on their shoulders and carried him through the streets of Tampa, shouting patriotic slogans and singing the Cuban national anthem.

The next day, Martí gave another speech, this one in remembrance of eight medical students who had been executed in Havana twenty years earlier. In the speech, he did not lament the death of the students but, rather, said that sometimes he saw death as necessary, as the "pillow, as the



yeast, as the triumph of life.”⁷ He urged the crowd to rise to the heroism and sacrifice that would be needed to gain the long-desired and fought-for independence of Cuba. The speech was greeted with as much enthusiasm as his speech of the day before. The two speeches were printed in a pamphlet that was distributed throughout Cuban communities in Florida. No doubt they were read aloud to the workers in the cigar-making factories.

Martí was made a member of the Cuban Patriotic League of Tampa. He met with its members and with a delegation of workers to draft a statement of the aims of the revolutionary movement. They drew up two documents now known as the *Tampa Resolutions* and the *Bases of the Cuban Revolutionary Party*. There is little doubt that these two documents were written primarily by Martí. In them, he set forth the organization of the party, which would consist of all the local social and revolutionary clubs. It would collect funds, encourage its friends in Cuba to follow a revolutionary course, and establish relations with other revolutionary movements throughout Latin America.

When Martí returned to New York, he took steps to include all the New York clubs in the party he was forming. His next move was to contact the various clubs and revolutionary organizations in



Key West, Florida. The Key West revolutionaries were much more active than those in the rest of the United States, and they had actually built up an underground system in Cuba itself. Martí knew that such an organization was crucial to his plans, so he set about winning over Key West Cubans to his side. Rather than replace their organizations with his own, he sought to join them, and thus present a united front to the Spanish colonial government.

Martí visited Key West on December 26, 1891, and met with all the leaders of the patriotic and revolutionary clubs. Because he was in ill health, he was unable to speak to the assembled revolutionaries. On January 5, 1892, he was at least able to read the *Tampa Resolutions* and the *Bases of the Cuban Revolutionary Party* to all the delegates. These were unanimously accepted, and the congratulations and celebrations that followed made it obvious to everyone that José Martí was the real leader of the Cuban movement for independence.

Martí returned to New York and, on March 14, 1892, published the first issue of a new Spanish-language newspaper named *Patria*. This paper became the official voice of the revolutionary movement. Martí, of course, was its editor; in its pages he urged other Cuban

communities to issue their own newspapers in order to keep the revolutionary spirit alive.

The Cuban Revolutionary Party's existence was formally announced on April 10, 1892. All Cuban and Puerto Rican patriotic organizations and clubs were included in the new party. For the first time, all Spanish-speaking émigrés and exiles were united in the pursuit of one aim, the independence of Cuba from Spain. Martí was designated the official delegate of the body, which meant that for all practical purposes he was the president.

The final aim of the revolutionary party was to promote a revolt inside Cuba while at the same time invading it with a military force from the outside. In order to do this, Martí had to have the support and cooperation of military veterans of the Ten Years War. Most of the officers of the rebel army were in exile in various countries in Latin America. Many of them had remained active plotters against Spain and were anxious to renew the war against that country. They all had their separate followers and their separate plans for renewing the struggle. It was now Martí's task to unite them under one organization, the Cuban Revolutionary Party.

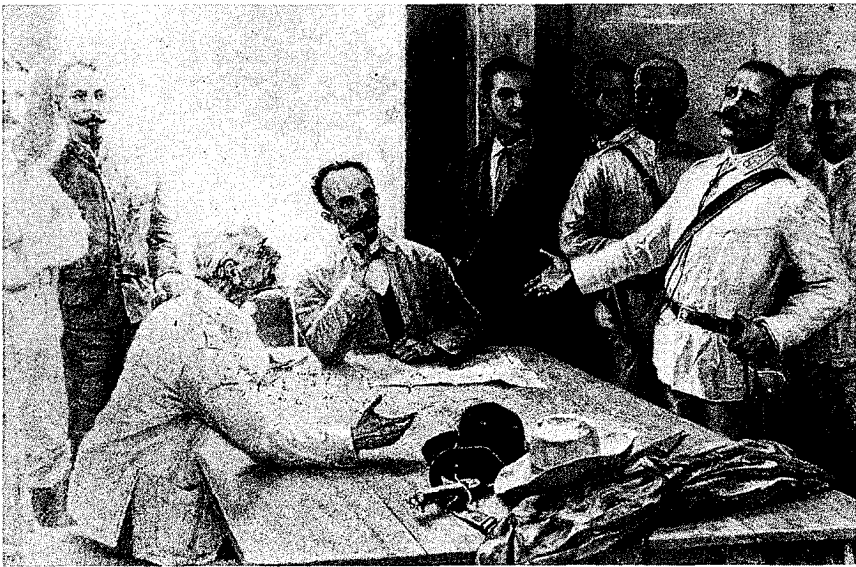
Everyone in the party agreed that the leader of the military wing had to be General Máximo Gómez, who was still considered a hero by most Cubans. Martí and Gómez had broken off relations eight



years previously, in 1884. Now, however, Martí felt that it was time for them to forget their differences and unite in the task ahead. Martí and General Gómez exchanged friendly letters, with the result that Martí visited Gómez in the Dominican Republic. Their meeting took place at Gómez's ranch at Montecristi, near the capital city of Santo Domingo. The two men came to what has been called the *Agreement of Montecristi*. This document announced that the Cuban Revolutionary Party would devote itself to preparing for the war and that the war would be conducted by General Gómez as commander-in-chief.

Martí next went to Costa Rica, where he met with the other hero of the Ten Years War, General Antonio Maceo. Martí also had to do some fence-mending with Maceo, with whom he had also broken off relations in 1884. Martí convinced a reluctant Maceo, who was prospering as a landowner and farmer in Costa Rica, to join the party and serve as Gómez's field general.

Martí now turned all his energies toward raising funds and solidifying the authority of the Cuban Revolutionary Party throughout the United States, the Caribbean, and Central America. He traveled widely in all three areas, giving speeches, appointing or backing local representatives to the party, and generally strengthening the party's organization.



Martí met with General Antonio Maceo and listened to his views about the future of the Cuban government. Unfortunately, they often disagreed.

One of his main objectives was to build an underground network in Cuba itself that would recognize and take direction from the party. To this end, he sent emissaries to Cuba to make contact with all the rebel groups on the island and to try to join them all in a united front.

Raising money was a problem. The wealthy landowners in Cuba and the Cuban manufacturers and businessmen in the émigré communities were still reluctant to break away completely from Spain. They believed that self-government under Spanish rule was still the best course to follow.

Martí, of course, believed that complete independence was the only answer to Cuba's problems. So he turned to the working people of the Cuban communities, and they responded by contributing willingly to the party's cause. The tobacco workers of Tampa and Key West contributed a day's pay each week!

Unfortunately, the United States suffered an economic depression in 1884, and it had a severe effect on the cigar-making industry in this country. Many Cubans lost their jobs and were forced to move to other parts of the United States in search of work. Strikes among the remaining workers in Key West further disrupted Martí's influence there and he was in danger of losing an important power base. The economic situation gradually improved, but not many people had confidence in its stability. Martí decided to act while the party was still an active force in Cuban revolutionary affairs.

