

---

May 20th, 1902: the false independence

By: Jorge Wejebe Cobo / CAN  
20/05/2022



On May 20th, 1902, the U.S. interventionist authorities handed over power in Havana to the first Cuban president, Mr. Tomás Estrada Palma. In different cities and towns, the emergence of the new Republic was celebrated after 30 years of struggle for independence.

Thousands of people crowded the Havana seafront and some others went to the Captain General Palace to witness how this building, and the Castle of El Morro, the American flag was lowered. In turn, the flag of the lonely star was raised, while balloons painted with the Cuban flag were released and triumphant arches made of wood were raised across the island for either patriotic reasons or related to the newly reached friendship with the allegedly selfless behavior of our northern neighbor.

Simultaneously, the first photographic studies reproduced images of beautiful young girls adorned with the Cuban flag next to an American soldier who gallantly protected it, while major media of the time portrayed the event without sparing words of gratitude for the intervention of the United States.

That was the predominant popular ideology that hid the true interests of the emerging imperialism, which could only be successful after the fall in combat of José Martí and Antonio Maceo, main leaders who, with a clear anti-imperialist conscience, could guarantee the unity of Cubans to prevent annexationist plans.

There were few patriots who realized the true goals of the false allies, described with great sincerity by one of the main actors in that plot, the U.S. Governor Leonardo Wood.

*"There is, of course, little or no independence left Cuba with the Platt Amendment and the only consistent thing to do now is to seek annexation (...) it is quite apparent that she is absolutely in our hands (...) With the control which we have over Cuba, a control which will soon undoubtedly become possession. We shall soon practically control the sugar trade of the world. The island will gradually become Americanized and we shall have in time one of the richest and most desirable possessions in the world."*

The enthusiastic Wood had good reasons after the establishment of the world's first neocolonial system on the neighboring island, already foreseen by the founders of the United States as the ripe fruit that would fall into their hands after breaking away from the Spanish colonial empire.

They then waited patiently, until the Cubans, in 1898, in their third war of independence, predicted that the certain defeat of Spain was a matter of time.

The opportune and mysterious blast of the U.S. battleship Maine in the bay of Havana, at the beginning of 1898, gave the final push for the intervention of the American troops that required the support of *mambí* fighters for the landing of the U.S. marines and operations in the eastern shores.

To this end, they directly contacted military chiefs in the area such as Calixto García, with which, in addition to facilitating their military operations, the invaders sowed possible discord among pro-independence ranks, since, as a principle, there was no recognition of the supreme command of the Liberation Army nor the authorities of the Republic in Arms.

After the brave and decisive help of the Cubans for the triumph of the campaign, they prevented the Liberation Army and General Calixto García himself from entering Santiago de Cuba, to participate in the Spanish surrender in 1898, under the pretext of possible revenge of the Cubans against the Spaniards, which prompted the worthy response of the Cuban leader in a letter addressed to General William Shafter, in which he vigorously protested the insult.

The prominent Mambí chief wrote to the Yankee soldier: *"(...) we are not a savage people unaware of the principles of civilized war; we form a poor and tattered army, as poor and tattered as the army of your ancestors was in its noble war for the independence of the United States of America; just like the heroes of Saratoga and Yorktown, we respect our cause too much to stain it with barbarism and cowardice."*

In Tomás Estrada Palma, the U.S. politicians had a servile collaborator. The future Cuban president had settled in the United States, where he dedicated himself to education, and from his initial patriotic stances during the Ten Years' War, he gradually convinced himself that his fellow countrymen were incapable of governing themselves without the tutelage of the great power, and foresaw that annexation could be a solution to the future.

However, these considerations were almost secrets and he even came to replace José Martí as the head of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, which he dissolved after the war ended, closed the Party's newspaper ***Patria*** and was a major factor in the demobilization of the Liberation Army and the governing bodies of the Revolution, among other services provided for imperial purposes.

The U.S. administration also forced the Constituent Assembly, in charge of preparing the Fundamental Law of the Republic, to include in its sections the Platt Amendment, drawn up by a

senator of the same name that established the right of his country to take military action in the island. It also prohibited the nation from establishing international treaties, created conditions to cede the Isle of Pines to the Union and forced the delivery of bays for coal bases, among other conditions detrimental to national dignity.

Thus was born the new republic that was considered a protectorate of the United States worldwide, with the appearance of a sovereign territory for having a flag, an anthem and a presumably independent government.

It was not until January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1959 that the definitive dismantling of more than 50 years of imperialist domination, promoted on that distant May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1902, would begin.

A historical truth that still today, 120 years later, triggers the visceral hatred of the U.S. rulers and their puppets of Cuban origin, residing mainly in South Florida, against the revolutionary process that restored dignity to our people, willing to defend its conquests against any plan threatening its independence and integrity, as Cuba has proven right throughout 63 years of Revolution.

**Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff**

---