

JOSE MARTI: THE IDEA OF THE REPUBLIC

By Lillian Bertot, Ph.D

"Each nation is cured according to its nature, which requires diverse doses of medicine, depending on whether this or that factor is missing in the different sickness or medication. Neither Saint-Simon, nor Karl Marx, nor Marlo, nor Bakunin, are the reforms that agree with our body. Assimilating that which is useful is as judicious, as it is senseless to imitate blindly." José Martí 1

In 1961 the specialists in the work of José Martí, Manuel Pedro González, and Iván A. Schulman commented: "For the ideologues of the extreme left, Martí's democratic credo has expired; it is not so for those who still believe in the possibilities of traditional liberalism." (2)

For Cuba and for Spanish America the year 1959 marked the beginning of the implementation of the socialist plan. In 1960 leftist academics and intellectuals met in Havana eagerly wanting to install a socialist model in Cuba. The truth is that more than forty-five years after González and Shulman's observation it is the socialist totalitarian model implanted in Cuba and proposed for Latin America by the communist ideologues that has been discredited in the world; it is not so in Cuba or in Latin America. However, we suggest that communist ideologues produced a political, social and economic debacle in Cuba and in great measure economic stagnation of Latin America. At the outset of the Castro revolution, the Cuban revolutionary leadership abandoned the democratic political model and strayed from democratic capitalism, free enterprise and a market economy, to which Martí devoted so many pages. The group of people who comprised the government of Cuba in 1959 adopted the one-party communist socialist model of government, the subordination of individual rights to the State, and the socialist economy of economic centralism and planning, totalitarianism, in the case of Cuba. The result of this social experiment has been the expected disaster of traditional social, economic, and political Cuba.

Always within the parameters of the liberal project, political as well as economic and cultural of the XIX century where Jose Martí's work is inserted, and barring the epochal differences, this essay will try to establish Martí's thought on these three aspects of the Cuban nation in tune with today's reality. The progression of Martí's ideas runs parallel to the chronology of his life. The life of Martí spanned from 1853 up to 1895.

However, there are evident coincidences between Martí's ideas and the realities of the 20th century, and even with those of the present century.

For José Martí as a forerunner of the ideas of freedom, democracy, and free enterprise, for Cuba and America, freedom and dignity almost exclusively guarantee the success of the social project. For Martí, "freedom is a spontaneous force: one develops it, one does not repress it." (3)

With regard to freedom, Martí establishes it as the *sine qua non* condition of happiness and the spiritual, material, and

moral development of the person. The ideas on individual autonomy, self-government, and freedom abound in Martí's work as well as define it. Freedom as an essential figure in his work is a metaphor of movement, of introspection, and of ethical questioning, of creation, action and consequently of the psychological, political and economic development of individuals. Martí's thoughts, however, are not limited to the glorification of the individual per se, but of the virtuous person, in his/her relationship with him/herself and with society. One would have to conclude that Martí's thoughts like St. Thomas Aquinas's in the XIII century, are also derived from the classical Aristotelian thought that perceives the activity of the person in society as a complement of ethics, of economics and of politics. (3a)

According to Martí, freedom is based on the concept of a developing and evolving human conscience and in this case the concept develops along the psychological aspect of Aristotelian biology: "Joy is already dawning in the gigantic crisis; from each new boil the world becomes more beautiful [...]" (4)

For Martí freedom is humanity's aspiration, but it also is an acquired value. Martí participates in the concept of rational freedom, which most systematic development occurs in the progression of Aristotelian thought from Socrates to the Whigs (4b). José Martí adds: "The only way to secure freedom is through the pure and creative work of the hands, through the real tasks of the mind [...] workers or lackeys." (5)

Let us not forget that Martí's century was the century of the wars of Independence, of the Liberator, the century of the liberal constitutions in Latin America and of the first republics. It was the century of the North American democracy and of the Spanish

republic, of the unions and of the labor movements. It was the century of the Cuban Revolutionary Party that set down the bases for the constitutional assembly that in turn would set down the bases of the future Republic. It was the century of the abolition of slavery, and equality. It was the century of redeeming action, where freedom had to be won.

In the case of Martí, his personal experiences, his studies, his unyielding dedication to a destiny foreseen since youth: the enterprise of the independence of Cuba, his life and his devotion to truth and duty guided him in the path of rational will. Martí's century was the century of the founding of America. Martí said:

"Or the republic is based on the total character of each one of its children, the habit of working with their hands and to think on their own, the entire exercise of themselves and the respect, as family honor, of that total exercise in others; the passion, in short, for the decency of man, or the republic is not worth a single tear from our women, nor a single drop of blood from our braves." (6) And he added:

"The people do not have but one tyrant; and it is their lack of surveillance of their freedoms. Neither sleep, nor trust, and

**“
Freedom
is a spontaneous
force: one develops
it, one does not
repress it”**

never in country of free thought, will they fall in servitude." (7) He also said: "The guarantee of the Republics is in the numerous amount of wills that enter in its government. [...] The conservative is supposed to always complement the liberal, without whom he will be a bad liberal; [...]" (8) And he added: "[...] An authoritarian society is, of course, one based on the concept, sincere or fake, of human inequality, in which the execution of the social duties are demanded from those who are refused their rights, for the principal benefit of power and the pleasure of those who deny them: mere remains of a barbaric state." (9)

With respect to democracy Martí understands that representative democracy is the political system that has produced peace through the civilized and free exchange of ideas. Like the liberals of his time Martí fought against monarchic despotism and against what came to be identified as positivistic totalitarianism. (9a)

Like the more enlightened Spanish American democracies Martí denounced *caudillismo* [rule by a strong man] as an evil to eradicate in Latin America. Just as he penetrated the dangers of a planned society and social engineering: "[...] the positivists want, in accordance with their maxim that it be known, so as to foresee or provide. This seems more important in that which is moral or physical. In order to guard against the risks it is necessary to know where they are. It does not enable us to conquer the obstacles and dangers that life brings, that for a guilty charity, they keep us blindfolded, so we neither see nor know about them." (10)

With regard to Martí and the economy, González and Schulman comment: "When one thinks that Martí was above all a great poet and an artist in love with beauty, it is astonishing to corroborate that he also possessed a practical gift, a technical capacity and the realistic and empirical sense to approach the most complex economic questions. [...] Martí's behavior during the First Monetary Pan-American Congress, 1891 and the series of articles that he wrote on the issue, reveals the extensive knowledge he had with regards to economics, and the sagacity and penetration of its theories" (11)

José Martí expressed his ideas at the Monetary Congress where, by the way, he defined as the only moral monetary formula that of basing money on real values like gold and silver as follows: "The uniformity of money is an enterprise worthy of democratic nations, convenient for international peace and indispensable for the complete enjoyment of domestic freedom." (12) And he adds: "Who says economic union, says political union. The people who buy are the people who command; those who sell, serve. It is necessary to balance trade, to insure freedom. The people who want to perish sells to a single nation, and the one who wants to survive, sells to more than one. The excessive influence of a country in the trade matters of another, turns into political influence. [...] The people who want to be free, should be free in business." (13)

The democratic capitalism of cooperation characterizes his economic plan: "The right of the worker could not ever be hatred of capital: it is the harmony, the reconciliation, the coming together of each." (14) And he adds: "Absolute freedom in trade is very useful for a structured country: [and he asks] is it the same useful for a country in the process of structuring itself?" (15)

A participatory economy, democratic and free, never a collectivist, totalitarian model was Martí's aspiration. Martí never doubted that private property is the basis of public wealth and prosperity. However, José Martí said: "Prosperity not subordination to virtue makes one a villain and degrades the people; it

hardens them, corrupts and troubles them." (16) And added: "to be good is the only way to happiness. To be cultured is the only way to be free. But, as it is common in human nature, it is necessary to be prosperous in order to be good." (17)

Martí considered that a centralized and planned economy would end up completely eliminating initiative, creativity and human dignity. Martí said: "there is not on earth any other honest path than the one which one opens up with his own arms." (18) And he added: "Freedom is the right that every man has to be honest, to think and to speak without hypocrisy." (19)

For Martí, honest work is the basis of honest capital and his aspiration was one where capital and workers would complement each other in a relationship of cooperation and freedom. Martí said: "It is good to lead; but it is not good that a leader would choke its people." (20) And he adds: "Work, this sweet comfort, this source of sources, this spring of origins, this chisel, paintbrush, creator, reminiscent, this friend that unites, adds, smiles, invigorates and cures, [...] Work gives me joy." (21)

However, Martí emphasizes the vicissitudes of the workers and poor laborers and devotes a great deal of his writings to the Christian doctrine of love and social duty to improve the human condition. It is to charity that he makes reference, or perhaps to the conviction, that the economy and community work in pursuit of the common good, constitute along with personal freedom, the pillars of society. Martí said: "Very, definitely: while there is a man who sleeps in the mud, how can there be another who sleeps in a golden bed? Dry the fetid districts in the cities; raze insanitary houses to the ground; may idle capitals build, and may the poor be given low rent or free housing, if they are not able to pay, houses that are clean and pleasing to the eyes. [...] How can one expect clean and godly souls from a foul environment? [...] A clean and ventilated home is a school." (22)

Martí embodies the transition that the Western liberal society of the XIX century should have made in order to face and solve the social and economic problems of the XX century. José Martí exemplifies the man of the XIX century, liberal and democratic who within the parameters of a state that guarantees human rights and a free market economy, noted and denounced the iniquities and excesses that existed in that society.

According to González and Schulman: "Martí was not a sociologist, in the academic sense that the term has today. His ideas on the topic are dispersed in the seventy-one volumes in which his writings have been collected. But if he did not leave a technical treatise in sociology, he did write a long series of reflections of a sociological nature that reveals his ongoing concern for these problems. These meditations [add González and Schulman] have, in general, a pragmatic rather than a theoretical character, and they can be applied the same to Spanish America and to the United States." (23)

José Martí said: "Workers are not inferior beings, nor should one tend to house them in corrals and govern them at the point of a spear, but by opening up from brother to brother, the considerations and rights that assure the peace and happiness of the people." (24) And he added: "[...] and there is no social equality without equality of culture." (25) An observation of Martí that is of extreme importance with regard to the theoretical basis of Marxism and that, in fact, makes the position of the Cuban very clear: it destroys the fallacious and odious premise of class struggle as the cause of historic changes: "There are no more than two classes of men: that of the good, and that of the

bad. It angers one to hear talk of classes. Recognizing that they exist is to contribute to them. Refusing to recognize they exist, helps to destroy them.” (26)

However, the possibility of corruption of the rich and powerful does not escape Martí. His writings agree with the treatises against usury alluded to by the Nobel Prize winner in Economics, Friedrich Hayek, and to the basis of the new democratic order to which makes reference the Catholic theorist, Michael Novak. (26a) However, his doctrine is a warning and an admonishment to human excesses, a call to virtue and not an insistence upon the sin.

Although he recognizes in material poverty a source of moral integrity and of spirituality, he does it while recognizing the moral integrity and the spiritual purity of the rich and powerful when these are generous and willing to sacrifice their wealth and their power for a just cause, for duty. Martí said: “Fraternity is not a concession, it is a duty.” (27)

Martí made his aspiration very clear to promote access to wealth through honest work and its attainment by all as a rational end for the society. Martí’s economic and social war was against poverty and ignorance and not in favor of their preservation.

With regard to Martí, González and Schulman comment: “In his Americanist ideas two essential concerns are perceived: the preparation of the masses for a more dignified and noble life by means of education, and the indispensable material complement to this postulate that in his ideation always goes together with the first: economic improvement.” (28)

In order to win the war against ignorance and poverty it is necessary to possess great diligence and altruism. Martí said: “Education, who does not know it? Is above all a work of infinite love.” (29) And he added: “[...] It is no more than a crime for he who sees poverty, and can do something about it, and does not.” (30)

For Martí only in freedom and material comfort are man and women creative, given to moral action, and to duty, productivity, and culture. José Martí added: “If the education of men is the future shape of a nation, the education of women guarantees and presages the kind of men that it will produce. [...] If the mothers bring home that custom of servility, complacency with oppression, that is acquired in the enslaved nations and in tyrannical institutions, the pedagogy of fear and obedience will thwart the education of children based on love and duty. Oppressing systems only produce hypocrites or despots.” (31) And he said: “Truly, there is not a more hateful spectacle than that of servile talents.” (32)

According to Gonzalez and Schulman: The ideas of the Teacher on education are dispersed in hundreds of writings and letters. [...] his educational doctrine is superior to those of all the great American educators: Luz and Caballero, Bello, Sarmiento, José Pedro Varela, and even that of the Spanish Francisco Giner de los Ríos. [...] For Martí teaching was an inescapable responsibility of the state and he wanted it absolutely secular, universal, free and obligatory, up to completing secondary school.” (33) Martí said: “Things are not to be studied in the systems that direct them; but in the way they are applied and in the results they produce.” (34) “Ignorance kills people and it is necessary to kill ignorance. Fanaticism weakens people and it is necessary to extinguish fanaticism. The blind belief in unproven truths, which cannot be humanly proven, destroy the dignity of intelligence and that of character. It is necessary to foment the study of the sciences as the only

path to the knowledge of truth. (35)

As for the judicial basis of society, justice and impartiality before the law are its basic premises. Martí said: “The nation begins with justice.” (36) And he added: “ There is only one species of men more vile and worthless than the demagogues: those who accuse as such those who peacefully and honestly request the distribution of justice.” (37)

As for religion Martí wrote: “Ah, religion, always as false as dogma in the light of reason, it is eternally as true as poetry.” (38)

Martí never pronounced himself agnostic. Comment González and Schulman: “But if he did not believe in any hierarchical dogma nor accepted any of the ‘revealed truths’ that so many churches spread, he was, on the other hand, a religious spirit *sui generis*, and he admitted the existence of a spirit, essence or immanent creative force that in his conception is always linked to nature, to the great All. He rejected [continue González and Schulman] the anthropomorphic allegorical God conceived by certain religions like the Hebrew and the Catholic for example.” (39)

His God, was the “God of the knowledge,” the “God of Creation.” he was not a mystic, “in his work reason and intuition battled each other” (39a), Martí said: “the intuition finishes what the understanding begins.” (39b) And he added: “God exists, however, with the idea of the good, that watches over the birth of each being, and leaves a pure tear in the soul that it embodies. The good is God. The tear is the source of the eternal feeling.” (40)

“There is a God: man; there is a divine force: everything. Man is a piece of the infinite body, that creation has sent to earth blindfolded and bound in search of his father, his own body.” (41)

However, there would be great reservation on the part of Martí as to the governing role the Catholic Church played in America. According to González and Schulman in their work on Martí, the first at decoding Martí’s thoughts on the problem of the Catholic Church: “Martí’s attitude in the face of the problem-better said, the problems-that the enormous economic, political, social, educational, etc. power of the Catholic Church posed in Spanish America in his time does not differ but in the degree of clarity and sagacity with which he perceived this evil, from that of all the great writers and patriots of the previous century.” (42)

And González and Schulman continue: “Unyielding anticlerical were all the most political, intellectual, and morally important men that America has produced, from Bilbao and Lastarria, to Alberdi, Sarmiento, Montalvo, Palma, González Prada, Hostos, Batle Ordoñez, Ingenieros, and Varona. [...]” (43) Adding: “The church, as an institution, supported and acquitted Spain and its permanence in Cuba, as it had done before when it anathematized the zeal of the American patriots who fought to liberate themselves from Spanish tutelage.” (44)

González and Schulman continue : “In Mexico, by having been more prejudicial there even still in other parts of the clerical domain, they produced two generations against the ecclesiastic power. The one that Benito Juárez led is the more illustrious and exemplary. In this liberating crusade they did not lack priests of superior virtue and talent which they pronounced themselves with energy against the prevalence that in so many areas exercised the church [...]” (45) For Friedrich Hayek the church participates from the totalitarian project. (46) This is, however, an aspect of the Hayekian theories that Novak



avoids, he prefers to rescue that from anarchistic thought of the "Catholic Whig" that was Santo Tomás de Aquino and the new postures of the Pope Juan Pablo II. (46a) With regard to Martí, González and Schulman add: "Martí doesn't attack the dogma nor the individual beliefs, and still less the religious feeling. What Martí whips with great energy and proves reiteratively the avarice of the institution, the wrong use that makes up their moral authority, the fanaticism that foments in ignorant masses, their dogmatism, their proclivity to the prevalence, their pharisaism, their conduct—as an institution- is so disclaiming and divorced of the pristine Christian doctrine." (46) For Martí, "The first duty of man is to think for himself [...]" "To see does not serve me, if the explanation is not of what I see, if my understanding doesn't become element of judgment what is outside of me." (47) "I find that they kill me a son every time that they deprive a man of the right to think," he said. (48) Likewise added Martí: "[. . .] for the first time the astonished loyal observer asks, if the Catholic doctrine will fit in a free town really without damaging it, and if it is so much the virtue of freedom, that reestablishes a church in their primitive state of poetic dogma in the souls to be unfortunately the most effective instrument of the suppressors of the human lineage." (49) According to Reinaldo Arenas in his article in *Art News*, entitled "José Martí: intellectual of exile," January of 1982, p. 9, "In 1884 Martí wrote the following: The man that now wants the state to look after him in order to not have to look after himself, would have to work then in the measure, for the time and work that the state would assign him, since this, on whom all the duties would fall, would naturally give all the necessary power to obtain the means of completing those. To be servant of oneself the man would pass to be servant of the State. To be a slave to the capitalists, as they are now called, he would be a slave to the officials." José Martí did not only result as a prophet as Arenas suggests in his article, but in these words he captured a synthesis of ethical, political, and economic convictions for future generations. This short paragraph allows us to see that which is important for Martí; the concepts of the human person and those of the individual as he relates to the State in its political and economic functions.

By having been better acquainted with Martí's ideas, Cubans would have saved themselves some very serious errors. It is for that reason that to conclude this quick and very incomplete approximation to Martí's ideas, I suggest that the municipal libraries begin a cycle of studies of the work of José Martí that proposes to rescue his thought as their first objective. The study and discussion of his work would leave the field open for the study of the ideas of freedom in the Americas, continuing along the lines traced by one of its most famous representatives, José Martí.

NOTES

1. José Martí. *Obras completas*. La Habana, Editorial Trópico, 1936-1953, vol. XXXVIII, 187.
2. Manuel Pedro González e Iván A. Schulman. *José Martí: esquema ideológico*. México: Publicaciones de la Editorial Cultura, T. G., S. A., 1961, p. 386.
3. Martí, *Ibid.*, vol. XLVIII, p. 29.
- 3a. Michael Novak. *This Hemisphere of Liberty: A philosophy of the Americas*. Washington, D. C., The AEI Press, Publisher for

- the American Enterprise Institute, 1990, pp. 107-123. "Apart from the exercise of virtue and character, in fact, it would seem that human liberty is little more than a cloud of whimsy, desire, and inclination, which reflective reason, like the lamp of Lady Liberty, has yet to dispel." p. 122.
4. Martí, *Ibid.*, vol. XVII, p. 165. "[. . .] la religión, en suma, de los hombres libres, nuevos, vasta, grandiosa, fraternal, humana, libre como ellos.
- 4a. Martí, *Ibid.*, [Apunte inédito] vol. LXIV, p. 168.
5. Martí, *Ibid.*, vol. XVII, p. 145.
6. *Ibid.*, vol. IX, p. 155.
7. *Ibid.*, vol. XIV, p. 161.
8. *Ibid.*, vol. XLIV, pp. 38-39.
9. *Ibid.*, vol. LVI, pp. 82-83.
- 9a. F. A. Hayek. *The Road to Serfdom*, p. 16: "As is so often true, the nature of our civilization has been seen more clearly by its enemies than by most of its friends: "the perennial Western malady, the revolt of the individual against the species", as the nineteenth-century totalitarian, Auguste Comte, has described it, was indeed the force which built our civilization."
10. José Martí, *Obras Completas*. Ed., Jorge Quintana., Caracas: Litho-Tip C. A., vol. I 2nda parte, p. 951.
11. González y Schulman. *José Martí: esquema ideológico*, p. 405.
12. Martí. *Obras Completas*. Ed. Jorge Quintana. vol. III, p. 271.
13. *Ibid.*, Jorge Quintana, ed., vol. III, p. 262.
14. Martí. *Obras Completas*. vol. XLVIII, p. 187.
15. *Ibid.*, vol. XLVII, pp. 174-175.
16. *Ibid.*, vol. XVIII, p. 98.
17. *Ibid.*, vol. XXII, p. 136.
18. *Ibid.*, vol. XIX, p. 94.
19. *Ibid.*, vol. XXIV, p. 14.
20. *Ibid.*, vol. XXV, p. 184.
21. *Ibid.*, [Apunte inédito] vol. LXIV, p. 185.
22. *Ibid.*, vol. XXX, p. 159.
23. González y Schulman. *José Martí: esquema ideológico*, p. 341.
24. Martí. *Obras completas*, vol. II, p. 90.
25. *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. 42-43.
26. *Ibid.*, vol. XI, pp. 167-168.
- 26a. Michael Novak. *This Hemisphere of Liberty*, pp. 37-47.
27. *Ibid.*, vol. XLVIII, pp. 87-90.
28. González y Schulman. *José Martí: esquema ideológico*, p. 366.
29. Martí. *Obras completas*, vol. XXXIII, pp. 105-6.
30. *Ibid.*, vol. V, p. 117.
31. *Ibid.*, vol. XLVIII, p. 28.
32. *Ibid.*, vol. XVI, p. 15.
33. González y Schulman. *José Martí: esquema ideológico*, p. 365.
34. Martí. *Obras completas*, vol. XXXIII, pp. 105-6.
35. *Ibid.*, [Apunte inédito] vol. LII, p. 17.
36. *Ibid.*, vol. XIII, p. 200.
37. *Ibid.*, [Apunte inédito] vol. LXIV, p. 152.
38. *Ibid.*, vol. II p. 734.
39. González y Schulman. *José Martí: esquema ideológico*, p. 457.
- 39a. Wilfredo Fernández. *Martí y la filosofía*. Miami, Ediciones Universal, 1974, p. 51.
- 39b. Martí, *Obras Completas*. Ed. Jorge Quintana, vol. II, p. 13.
40. Martí. *Obras Completas*, vol. I, p. 35.
41. *Ibid.*, vol. XLVIII, p. 82.
42. González y Schulman. *José Martí: esquema ideológico*, p. 469.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 469.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 471.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 469.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 470.
- 46a. Michael Novak. *This Hemisphere*, pp. 63-88.
47. Martí. *Obras completas*, vol. LIV, p. 165.
48. *Ibid.*, [Apunte inédito] vol. LXXIII, p. 149.
49. *Ibid.*, vol. XXXIII, pp. 189-190.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arenas, Reinaldo. 'Martí, intelectual del exilio', *Noticias de Arte*, enero de 1982.
- Benemelis, Juan F. *Fin de una utopía*. Miami: GAD, 2005.
- Fernández, Wilfredo. *Martí y la filosofía*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1974.
- González, Pedro Manuel y Schulman, Ivan A. *José Martí: esquema ideológico*. México: Publicaciones de la Editorial Cultura, T. G., S. A., 1961.
- Hayek, F. A. *Hayek on Hayek*. Eds. Stephen Kresge and Leif Wenar. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- _____. *The Fatal Conceit, The Errors of Socialism*. Ed. W. W. Bartley III. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- _____. *The Road to Serfdom*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1944.
- Martí, José. *Obras Completas*. La Habana: Editorial Trópico, 1936-1953.
- _____. *Obras Completas*. Ed. Jorge Quintana. Caracas: Litho-Tip C. A., 1964.
- Mises, Ludwig von. *Socialism*. Trans. J. Kahane. Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1981.
- Novak, Michael. *El espíritu de capitalismo democrático*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Tres Tiempos, S. R. L., 1982.
- _____. *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: The Free Press, A division of Macmillan, Inc., 1993.
- _____. *This Hemisphere of Liberty, A Philosophy of the Americas*. Washington, D. C., The AEI Press, Publisher for the American Enterprise Institute, 1990.
- Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.