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PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS AND POLITICS IN CUBA: A CASE STUDY OF COSME DE LA TORRIENTE Y PERAZA (1872–1956)

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Abstract

The dependent character of the Cuban bourgeoisie in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1895–98, the cycles of economic and political crisis with roots in the Island's sugar monoculture and economic dependency on the US and the pattern of US interventions in Cuban affairs under the Platt Amendment produced a profound crisis of legitimacy of the Cuban state during the Republic. Public intellectuals, in Antonio Gramsci's definition, played an important role in mediating the cyclical crisis with the purpose of maintaining public consent for Republican institutions, political parties and elites. Cosme de la Torre y Peraza was a leading figure among public intellectuals who performed this role on behalf of Republican democracy beginning with the administration of President Estrada y Palma (1902–06) and culminating with the Fulgencio Batista regime (1952–58). His political career provides insights into the root causes of the crisis of confidence in Republican political institutions and leaders that paved the way for the Revolution of 1958.

Keywords: public intellectuals, Cosme de la Torre y Peraza, constitutionalism, legitimacy, Society for Friends of the Republic

Introduction

Barrington Moore's classic *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* advances the thesis that the democratic path to modernisation depends on the

strategic role played by the bourgeoisie in a country's development, asserting that 'no bourgeoisie, no democracy' (Moore 1967). According to Moore, the strategic role of the bourgeois class results from its detachment from feudal class relations to transform the nature of property relations, the state and society. In Antonio Gramsci's analysis of the capitalist state in *Intellectuals and the Organization of Culture* (Gramsci 1971), public intellectuals play a crucial role in legitimising bourgeois democracy by formulating political doctrines and ideologies that analyse the crisis and contradictions of capitalism, by creating awareness of the long-term interests of the bourgeoisie as a whole in the political system and by obtaining consensus of the popular classes for bourgeois rule. This article examines the political thought and career of Cosme de la Torriente y Peraza, a prominent public intellectual and politician of the Republic (1901–58) whose career exemplifies the pursuit of hegemony based on moral and intellectual arguments for the Constitutions of 1901 and 1940 and resistance to the Platt Amendment.

The Cuban bourgeoisie at the turn of the twentieth century was in a precarious position to play a strategic political role. Its nationalist credentials were threatened by its dependent 'comprador' status functioning as intermediaries for foreign capital in Cuba (McGillivray 2009: 63–86). Within the Cuban bourgeoisie, the sectors most dependent on foreign capital and markets, notably the sugar plantation and mill owners and those relying on trade and imports, were seldom an obstacle to US expansion. The Cuban industrial bourgeoisie did not gain significance in the domestic market until the Great Depression and the Second World War when US imports decreased and US owners of sugar mills were pressured out of the sugar industry and banking under the regulatory policies of populist governments (Domínguez 1978). However, few industries created in this period were able to survive foreign competition. In 1954, craft production still figured prominently in the Cuban economy, with 45.1 per cent of all factories having fewer than five workers. According to Jorge Ibarra Cuesta, 'Domestic industries were far from being able to cover domestic demand for the production of each of its branches, thus creating a deficit that would be satisfied by imports' (Ibarra 1995: 63). In general, the Cuban industrial bourgeoisie did not lend a nationalist character to the economy. The legitimisation function was complicated further by the neocolonial relations of the country with the US, reflected in the Platt Amendment and US geopolitical demands on Cuba in order for it to be accepted into the emerging American global empire.¹ The Cuban bourgeoisie after independence had to address these contradictions to claim their legitimacy to rule.

It was therefore imperative to the hegemony of bourgeois democracy that a strategic sector of this class constituted of public intellectuals evolved an awareness of its long-term class interests and formulated a nationalist programme that

would appeal to a broad-based alliance of social classes. Hegemony depended on the capacity to formulate such a nationalist political and economic development strategy, mobilising state power to obtain more favourable terms for Cuban capitalists and labour from the island's sugar monoculture, diversifying the economy and resisting foreign interventions in the island's domestic affairs under the Platt Amendment.

Historians and political scientists have pointed to the significance of Torriente y Peraza as a leading public intellectual of the Republic who exemplifies, on the one hand, a reform-minded nationalist critical of the Platt Amendment and its effects on Cuban politics, and whose career was dedicated to its abrogation and, on the other hand, as a prominent figure in the political crisis during the US occupation of Cuba from 1906 to 1909, and the Gerardo Machado and Fulgencio Batista regimes that threatened democratic legitimacy. US-based research on Torriente's role as a reform-minded nationalist and war veteran of the Revolution of 1895–98 is found in studies such as James Brown Scott's 'The Platt Amendment: What it is and is not' (Scott 1926), and in Gastón Fernández 'El 13 de Marzo de 1925' (Fernández 2005a) and 'El Tratado de Extradición Entre Cuba y España' (Fernández 2005b), examining the significance of his diplomacy and political thought with respect to US–Cuba relations under the Platt Amendment and the development of Cuba's 'international personality' during the Republic.

US scholars have shed greater light on Torriente's role in the mediation of political crisis during the first and second Republics. Louis A. Perez' *Army Politics in Cuba 1898–1958* (Perez 1976) discusses the role of the Unión Nacionalista in the political mediation between the regime and opposition during the Gerardo Machado administration touching on Torriente's role.² Torriente's significance in the political mediation of 1955–56 to end the Batista dictatorship is discussed in Marifeli Perez-Stable's *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course and Legacy* (Perez-Stable 2012), Hugh Thomas' *The Pursuit of Freedom* (Thomas 1971), and Jorge Domínguez' *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Domínguez 1978). Thomas, for example, writes that Torriente's mediation represented the 'last hope of middle class democracy' in Cuba.

Cuban historiography on Torriente is more extensive. Cuban scholarship during his lifetime includes his biography by Felix Lizaso (Lizaso 1952), works by Ruy Viña Lugo (Vina Lugo 1924), Emeterio S. Santovenia (Santovenia 1944), Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring (Leuchsenring 1975), René Lifríu (Lifríu 1945) and Manuel Márquez Sterling (Sterling 1954), examining his diplomacy and geopolitical thought, and a compendium of articles published honouring Torriente's election as honorary president of the World Federation of the United Nations in 1951 (Rubio 1951b). This body of work provides valuable data on Torriente as a

prominent public intellectual extolling him as a living ‘legend’ of Cuban patriotic resistance during colonial times and of constitutional legality during the Republic.

Other studies represented by the work of Jorge L. Marti (Marti 1958) and Antonio Lancis (Lancis y Sanchez 1958) emphasise his record as a mediator in Cuban political crises, most notably following Batista’s coup of 1952. Both scholars explore Torriente’s legacy in explaining the political crisis of Cuban democracy. More recent Marxist analysis explores his legacy as a public intellectual for bourgeois democracy during different political crises of the Republic, but is generally devoid of biographical research. The most relevant are studies by Oscar Pino Santos (Pino Santos 1983), Lionel Soto (Soto 1977), Enrique Collazo (Perez Collazo 1994), Jorge Ibarra Cuesta (Ibarra 1995), Rolando Rodríguez (Rodríguez 2012), Julio García Oliveras (García Oliveras 1979), Rolando Álvarez Estévez (Estévez 1973) and Jorge R. Ibarra Guitart (Ibarra Guitart 1999, 2003b) examining his performance in the banking crisis of 1920, the Isle of Pines dispute between the US and Cuba, the mediation of the 33, and the national crisis as a result of the Fulgencio Batista coup of 10 March 1952.

This study of Cosme de la Torriente y Peraza draws on this research as well as on articles published in newspapers and periodicals, his diary, and many of his letters and other documents of interest. Torriente’s publications provide a wealth of information. His masterful *Cuarenta Años de Mi Vida* is a vital resource (Torriente y Peraza 1939d). Other works include *Mi misión en Washington* (Torriente y Peraza 1952c), *Por la amistad internacional* (Torriente y Peraza 1951b) and *Cuba en la vida internacional* (Torriente y Peraza 1922). Of particular interest are articles by various intellectuals published on the life and work of Torriente, many of which may be found in the compilation, *Homenaje al Coronel Cosme de la Torriente en reconocimiento a sus grandes servicios a Cuba* (Rubio 1951b).

The Revolution of 1895–98, the First Republic (1902–33) and Resistance to the Platt Amendment

To understand Torriente’s role as a public intellectual, it is necessary to first consider his formative political experiences documented in his autobiography (Torriente y Peraza 1939d). The roots of Torriente’s political thought may be found in his childhood and as a young revolutionary during the war of independence. Torriente y Peraza was born on 27 June 1872 in the sugar mill, ‘La Isabel’, which his paternal grandfather, Don Cosme de la Torriente y Gándara, built on the land gifted to his wife, Doña Isabel Hernández y Castillo Rodríguez, by her father, Captain Sebastián Hernández y Cedres, one of the richest land-owners in the province of Matanzas. Torriente y Peraza’s father inherited the

properties but was forced to mortgage them in the 1880s in an attempt to modernise the mill to compete with European and American sugar beet producers protected and subsidised by their home countries. During the crisis in sugar prices as a result of the global recession of 1892, the properties were acquired by American investors. Torriente y Peraza would earn his living in the law firm he cofounded with his brother-in-law, Leon Broch, profiting little from sugar interests following Cuban independence (Boletín Legislativo 1902).

Torriente was influenced by his paternal grandfather, a staunch supporter of the Spanish Crown, who died when Torriente was two years old. Even though he rejected his paternal grandfather's politics by joining the nationalist insurgency while at the university, Torriente recounts his grandfather's influence on his life in his autobiography, writing that 'it is curious that not having known my grandfather, he has always been as present to me as my parents' (Torriente y Peraza 1939d: XXVI). During adolescence, Torriente's revolutionary views on Cuban independence were influenced by his Professor Guillermo Schweyer y Lamar, a writer and journalist who was preparing him to take the high school entrance exams. By the time he enrolled at the University of Habana, Torriente had clearly aligned himself with Schweyer's nationalist revolutionary thoughts joining the 'Logia Libertad' in his native Matanzas during which he secretly conspired against the Spanish authorities (Torriente y Peraza 1939d). He subsequently joined the 'Logia de los Caballeros de la Luz' (which evolved into the 'Club Revolucionario de Matanzas', a revolutionary organisation conspiring on behalf of the Cuban insurgents). Before the start of the third Revolutionary War of 1895–98, he had graduated from the University of Habana with a degree in philosophy.

The Logia's failed Ibarra city uprising on 24 February 1895, and the arrest of one of its most prominent Cuban leaders, Julio Sanguily, led leading conspirators to go into hiding or leave the Island. Torriente left for New York and joined the US-based insurgent forces preparing to launch a military expedition to the Island. From 1895 to 1996, the insurgents tried to return to Cuba six times, but were blocked by US law enforcement and the American Coast Guard and on one occasion when his expeditionary force neared the Bahamas by the British navy.³ On several occasions, he was imprisoned, put on trial and acquitted. It was only on the sixth attempt that he was able to return with rebel forces to join the armed struggle against Spanish occupation forces.

Arriving at the liberated areas, Torriente was placed under the command of Colonel Antonio Pérez, who commanded an infantry battalion at Guantánamo. Subsequently, he served under the command of distinguished leaders such as José Maceo, Máximo Gómez, Francisco Carrillo and José 'Mayía' Rodríguez. He was assigned crucial missions, including the transfer of confidential messages

from General Máximo Gómez to Lieutenant General Antonio Maceo (while the latter was based in Havana province) informing Maceo that Gómez would arrive at Las Villas and proposing a high-level meeting between them.

Torriente was promoted several times during the insurrection, serving in ever more responsible positions, starting with his role as a military auditor. He served as an aid to General Máximo Gómez and on the morning of 16 December 1896, he delivered the General the sad news of the death of the 'Bronze Titan', Antonio Maceo, on 28th November and of his son 'Panchito' Gomez Toro. He later served as Secretary and Chief of Staff to General Calixto García, a post he held until the final offensive of Cuban and American troops against the Spanish military garrison of Santiago de Cuba. Torriente rose to the rank of Colonel under the command of General García.

It is against this personal background, from his upbringing in Matanzas to his revolutionary experiences as a student at the University of Habana, to his military service in the revolutionary army that he developed his political beliefs and gained experiences in political mediation between two or more conflicting viewpoints or parties that would shape much of his adult life.

Two significant episodes stand out as early examples of Torriente's experiences and convictions on constitutionalism, rule of law and the potential for political mediation of disputes that are at the core of his political doctrines. In his autobiography, he writes,

In the beginning of 1897 I was part of a small Commission composed of more important and senior officials – I was the youngest – charged to accomplish, as we successfully accomplished, the settlement of differences between the Provisional Government and General in Chief, which in Camagüey had led to the resignation of the General, and in that process we prepared a draft of the organic law regulating military conduct. (Torriente y Peraza 1939d: XXXVI)

It was at this juncture that Torriente first becomes fully aware of the moral and pragmatic significance of the rule of law and peaceful mediation of disputes to deal with political conflicts. From that point on in his political career, Torriente assumed that while conflict is inherent in human nature and society it can be resolved by just laws and an impartial system of justice. A system of laws, enshrined in codes and constitutions, became the *sine qua non* for avoiding violent conflicts among Cubans and a necessary condition for bourgeois rule. A second experience reinforced those deeply held beliefs. In 1897, Torriente was tasked to investigate a dispute between General Javier de Vega and the Provisional Government of the revolution – a conflict that had its origin in the interpretation of orders issued by the General in Chief Máximo Gómez.⁴ The effective mediation of those disputes

avoiding a rupture between the army and civilian elites in the Provisional Government led to his subsequent promotion to Colonel under General García.

At the end of the War of Independence, Torriente completed his legal studies. He declined election to the Constitutional Assembly of Santa Cruz to protest the unfair treatment of his mentor, General Calixto García, by the Provisional Government. García had resigned his command in Oriente province to protest the treatment of his forces by the US General William Shafter during the US occupation of the city of Santiago. A month later, the Provisional Government in arms dismissed him on charges that he was carrying out administrative measures without its authority. Torriente's disillusionment with the Provisional Government led him to renounce all political positions in the early years of the first Republic. According to Torriente, 'the state of mind that I was in led me to distance myself for a time from public life' (Torriente y Peraza 1939d).

Torriente's early political thought grappled with the issue of legitimacy of the Cuban Provisional Government and the US transfer of power to the Cubans after the defeat of Spain. During the military occupation 1898–1901, perhaps fearing the radicalisation of Cuban public opinion, he undertook to calm the more extreme anti-American sentiments among the war veterans and political classes addressing those who believed that Cuban sovereignty would be limited by US imperialist ambitions. In a press article, Torriente rejected those views referring to the Congressional amendment to the US war declaration on Spain (the Teller Amendment). Torriente wrote,

The resolution of 18 April is in effect ... It affirms that the United States has no intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over the island of Cuba ... Why do we torment ourselves saying daily that the United States intended to stay with the island forever? (Torriente y Peraza 1898: 6)

Subsequently, expanding on this theme, Torriente wrote, 'It is undoubted that we are well-treated, and although they are guiding us by the hand, we should follow, since they lead us on a good path' (Torriente y Peraza 1898: 8). In those tumultuous years, Torriente was the foremost advocate of ideas that would pave the way for the restoration of full Cuban sovereignty calling for a government of national unity in which competing factions would unite behind the principle of non-intervention by foreign powers, most notably the US under the Platt Amendment, affirming that 'to reach this end, a closer union must exist between those who have been in the revolution or against it, regardless of opinions, parties, or whether Cuban or Spanish' (Torriente y Peraza 1898).

During the administration of President Estrada y Palma (1902–06), Torriente accepted the post of Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Spain

working under his close family relative (by Torriente's marriage to Estela Broch O'Farill) Secretary of State Juan O'Farill y Chacón. At this stage, Torriente's nationalism focused on establishing Cuba's international identity by negotiating commercial and extradition treaties with Spain (Fernández 2005b). Torriente was aware that normalising relations with Spain would serve two important functions for the new Republic. First, it would help mediate political tensions between Cubans and Spaniards in Cuba which had the potential to destabilise the regime and perhaps provoke US intervention under the obligations incurred in the Treaty of Paris (1898). Second, the diplomatic feat would cement the Island's international identity as a sovereign state enhancing the legitimacy of the Republic and acting as a bulwark against interventions in Cuban affairs under the Platt Amendment.⁵

The political crisis that followed the US military occupation from 1906 to 1909 led Torriente to modify his analysis of the contradictions in Cuban politics.⁶ Torriente resigned the post during the second American occupation. In a letter addressed to the American pro-consul, Charles Magoon he wrote,

My resignation is due to the fact that I would die of shame if, after the spectacle that we (Cubans) have given to the world, I was obliged to return to Spain to perform in my position, and the same would be true of the same mission to any nation (...).I cannot serve my post in any nation, and much less in the one that was our former colonial master representing what is the negation of the ideas that I have defended, that is, to serve the Republic of Cuba under an interim administration of the United States. (Torriente y Peraza 1939c: 12–13)

Notwithstanding Torriente's repudiation of the occupation, he placed responsibility for what happened on the Cuban political classes, most notably the veterans of the War of Independence who led the political parties who, he wrote, 'had failed to do anything' to prevent the national and international humiliation. Thus, he argued, the source of the legitimacy crisis of the Republic was to be found in political factionalism, although his political doctrines would from here on recognise the contradictions for legitimacy rooted in the misinterpretation of the Platt Amendment by US policy makers providing them an illegal justification for intervention in Cuban domestic affairs.

During this phase, Torriente's political activities concentrated on what he now perceived to be the most fundamental contradiction facing the first Republic, namely the threat of continued US occupation. He was a founding member of the national Conservative party, joining with other public intellectuals opposed to the August 1906 Civil War, among them Enrique José Varona and José Antonio González Lanuza in pressing for a full restoration of national sovereignty. Torriente held key Party posts, including Secretary General, President of

the Commission for Organization and Propaganda, Vice President, and finally in 1914, as President of the Conservative Party.

Torriente spearheaded a movement to defend the Constitution of 1901 by mediating the political crisis that followed the US intervention. In 1907, Torriente represented public intellectuals confronting a political movement organised behind the so-called 'Practical Solution'. The solution, mostly backed by Liberals, supported ceding Executive power to an unelected Governor named in Washington while holding elections for the Cuban Congress. Torriente spoke for public intellectuals who pressed for presidential elections to occur before the end of the presidential mandate of President Theodore Roosevelt, who had promised to restore self-government to the Cubans. Torriente warned the political classes that Cuba could not determine what might happen to its future sovereignty under a different US president if the 'Practical Solution' was adopted. In this respect, the veteran revolutionary wrote,

It is safe to say that there will be massive disturbances, more terrible even than what can be imagined, if there is an indefinite prolongation of foreign government occupation, if the Cuban people become convinced that they will not regain their cherished independence. (Torriente y Peraza 1907: 20)

In terms of US-Cuban relations following the US occupation in 1906, Torriente understood more clearly than other leading members of the political classes that the Platt Amendment opened the door to recurring US intervention in the face of the violent disputes among Cuban factions. He concluded that the result would be a mediated sovereignty posing a mortal danger to both Cuban elites and American interests on the Island by inciting popular revolts and producing a legitimacy crisis of the socioeconomic and political order. Torriente further understood that the Conservative Party's historical role was to struggle for a legitimate constitutional regime capable of resolving disputes through electoral and legal means as the best alternative to autocracy or revolutions. He wrote that even if the Conservative Party might not constitute the majority party following US occupation, it would accomplish the more crucial legitimization function by contesting power through the electoral process. In this regard, as leader of the Conservatives, Torriente's thought on political parties evolved to define Conservatism as a loyal opposition, able to put the interest of the Cuban nation above partisan loyalties. Thus, he stated,

The mission of the Conservatives has been faithfully fulfilled. Without the existence of the Conservative Party there would have been no national elections, and without these, as orderly as they have been, we could not have restored the

Republic with the Liberal government of President Gómez. (Torriente y Peraza 1909: 26)

Torriente at this time offered practical alternatives to curtail political corruption. During the US occupation of 1906–09, state employment had increased significantly in an effort to purchase political stability by ‘absorbing the opposition to Palma Estrada into the government’ (Benjamin 1979: 21). War veterans were integrated into the Cuban civil service bloating the bureaucracy and becoming ‘decisive’ within the administration in fusing the emerging state with institutionalised corruption that cost 25 per cent of customs revenues (Cárdenas 1951: 296). Torriente took the lead, as Secretary of the Association of War Veterans, drafting a proposal suspending civil service tenure guarantees for a period of 18 months. The law passed the Cuban Congress but was struck down by the Courts, although it had the intended effect of slowing the rate of growth of state employees, especially of veterans (Guerra 1951). Furthermore, during the government of José Miguel Gómez, Torriente and Salvador Cisneros Betancourt led a progressive public anti-corruption campaign, denouncing a series of public fraud cases through manifestos of the Association of the National Council of Veterans. Torriente was widely perceived as an incorruptible political figure. In 1914, he resigned various positions in government over a corrupt scheme involving a 30-year concession made by the Liberal government to the ‘Compañía de Puertos de Cuba’ (Cárdenas 1951: 300).

Torriente became a critic of the Conservative Party during the elections of 1917 when it appeared to depart from adherence to rule of law principles by supporting widespread electoral fraud to maintain General Menocal in power for another four years. Now a Senator, Torriente warned his party that they would have to accept possible defeat at the polls as a result of their political mistakes. But this position brought him numerous critics, which in the end led him in his words to step ‘to one side’ issuing a severe judgement on the political conduct of his fellow Conservatives that

When our principles put us (the Conservatives) above personal or partisan conveniences, we won the election and carried General Menocal to the Presidency of the Republic, but after having abandoned many of our those principles and believed that we could do many of the same things that we censored when in opposition, we lost the popular support in the first round of elections of November and, in my opinion, will lose it definitively in Las Villas on 14 February. (Torriente y Peraza 1917a: 62)

Torriente’s warnings were not taken into account by President Mario García Menocal, and electoral fraud was carried out. The corrupted elections were

doubly damaging to the government and Constitution as it required further US intervention to quell political uprisings, this time in the form of US warships and Marines to ensure calm. This sequence of events confirmed Torriente's position that the legitimacy crisis was primarily the result of intra-elite political factionalism based on the apparent inability to perceive common interests in resolving disputes through peaceful mediation under the Constitution. As with other more enlightened sectors of the political class, Torriente supported the doctrine of 'domestic virtue', figuring prominently as an acerbic critic of departures from the principles of constitutionalism by political parties and elites.⁷

Torriente's thought during the period 1909–22, as leader of the Conservative Party and as Senator for Matanzas, matured into a coherent ethical theory of political development that encompassed under the rule of law, support of clean government, fair and regular elections, legal political equality for women and improved working conditions for labour. Torriente's thought expanded to alliances with previously excluded groups, for example, by appealing to grievances of Cuban women excluded from political life. Furthermore, rule of law and civilian control over the military were linked with anti-corruption initiatives. He was active in the Cuban Senate on several committees, including the Banking Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee. He also served on the Presidential Commission to reform the Constitution organised in 1921 by Liberal Alfredo Zayas. During this period, Torriente introduced an amendment that would guarantee women the right to vote, staking out the position of leading public intellectuals on women's suffrage. He consistently defended the view, as he stated

that Cuban women have the right to have a voice in resolving political problems, as do the men in Cuba ... they laboured for stability of the Republic as much, if not more, than we men and never have Cuban women jeopardized the independence of Cuba. (Torriente y Peraza 1939a: 84)

As Senator, Torriente developed a coherent theory of international relations and power as a natural complement to the doctrines of domestic virtue. Throughout his career, Torriente reflected on the contradictions created by the Platt Amendment, asserting that Americans had made a mistake by imposing it. He dedicated his subsequent diplomatic career to abrogating the insidious amendment, while urging that Cubans should learn to live with it until it was terminated. Torriente was a political reformer, criticising established political parties and elites who traded sovereignty for power by invoking US occupation to serve their own purposes. Torriente stressed the dangers to legitimacy from

repeated interference and from the bad administration and the corruption of Cuban governments writing that

in the future much damage will be done to the stability of the Republic by those who try to win elections by fraud and violence, much like those who without boundaries or propriety plunder the public treasury, mortgage the economic future of the nation, do not put obstacles to the prevailing administrative corruption, violate and fail to respect the Constitution and the laws, do not remedy the miseries and needs of the more modest part of our nation. (Torriente y Peraza 1917b: 81)

Torriente did not limit his harshest criticism to traditional parties. He criticised the elites' failure to recognise the effects of their actions on the legitimacy of the Republican political order, opening the door to a revolution from below by demanding more radical solutions to the Island's economic and political dependency.⁸ He warned the established interests that their ability to survive as a class depended on the legitimacy of the Republic as a third way between dictatorships and revolutions writing that

this protest will always serve to produce in the heart of our less educated citizens the idea that Americans unduly intervene in our internal affairs, when we ourselves with our conduct and unpatriotic behavior are the ones who are encouraging foreign intervention under the Permanent Treaty. (Torriente y Peraza 1939a: 84)

Several important challenges were raised by Torriente's thought to his contemporaries. Why would Cubans agree to accept the legitimacy of political elites mired in corruption and an economic system that perpetuated deep inequalities? Could reformist solutions by Cuban political elites meet popular demands and save their long-term interests in the system? Torriente's reformist doctrines were premised on public intellectuals guiding the bourgeoisie in rising above narrow self-interests. While Torriente's doctrines pointed to a reformist democratic path to address legitimate popular demands, in practice, injustices and inequalities persisted. Cuban political elites demonstrated an inability to limit their administrative corruption throughout the life of the Republic or to achieve significant political and economic reforms.

Torriente in the early 1920s undertook significant tasks in order to confront the contradictions produced by US interventions in Cuba. He developed nationalist doctrines for small state diplomacy based on Cuba's reliance on international law and organisations, especially the newly formed League of Nations,

and support for international human rights and humanitarian assistance as crucial elements for forestalling foreign interventions under the Platt Amendment. Torriente's doctrines prevailed in US–Cuba bilateral relations during his term as the first Cuban Ambassador to the US under the Liberal Alfredo Zayas. The focus of diplomacy was on the return of the Isle of Pines to Cuba as a first step towards the abrogation of the Platt Amendment (Torriente y Peraza 1952c). His diplomatic career thus aimed to deal with the contradiction to the legitimacy of Cuban constitutionalism by its inclusion of the Platt Amendment and by the Permanent Treaty.⁹

Torriente negotiated the return of the Isle of Pines to Cuban sovereignty, playing an important role in the US Senate's ratification of the Hays Quesada Treaty. Torriente understood the significance of Article VI of the Platt Amendment, stating that 'Cuba's rights to the Isle of Pines would be settled at a later date' to pursue diplomatic means to abrogate the despised Amendment. The clause had been inserted into the Permanent Treaty, at the insistence of Senator Thomas Platt (R-NY) in order to obtain Senate ratification based on 'it to be of the most advantageous points to defend the entrance to the Panama Canal'. Clause VI of the Treaty, however, had been opposed by President Theodore Roosevelt and by Secretary of War Elihu Root (Torriente y Peraza 1952c: 65). The conflicting positions demonstrated for Torriente the 'prerogative' assumed by the US in dictating to Cuba the terms of their relationship. It underscored the arbitrary nature of US policies towards Cuba, a weakness that Torriente exploited in his diplomacy. Torriente mobilised a coalition of national and transnational actors, including Supreme Court Justice William Taft and Carnegie Endowment President James Scott Brown and prominent US Senators. At the conclusion of the successful negotiations to return the Isle of Pines to Cuba, Torriente inexplicably resigned his post and retired from government.¹⁰

The Dictatorship of Gerardo Machado and the Crisis of Legitimacy (1925–32)

The Mambi veteran understood well the dangers (based on the experiences of 1906, 1917 and 1921) that re-elections through fraud and coercion posed for American intervention and for the legitimacy of the constitutionalism and rule of law. In 1927, when asked about his position with respect to the re-election of President Gerardo Machado, Torriente responded,

If he is up for re-election, as has been said since the beginning of his Government by many of its friends, there is no mistaking that it will lead to very large disturbances again in Cuba's future. Who can ensure that after the re-election

there will not come another revolution, as much as we who preach against it foresee multiple reasons? Why it would be a terrible disaster for the Republic. (Torriente y Peraza 1927: 153–57)

Torriente's concerns transcended his disapproval at the unfair and corrupt practices that led to re-elections of politicians, to include a broader emphasis on the danger of yet another internal upheaval that would precipitate yet another military intervention by the US. Torriente feared that the combination of loss of faith in the Constitution and foreign intervention would drive popular resistance unifying anti-Plattist sentiments with those calling for more radical socioeconomic changes in the Island's dependency on sugar monoculture and the US. For these reasons, he also objected to the rise of the 'cooperativismo' movement aimed at a corporatist pact between the Liberal and Conservative parties that would derail competitive elections and promote the extension of presidential powers.

In 1931, Torriente helped to organise and lead the Nationalist Union, an opposition movement to the Machado dictatorship made up of public intellectuals with the support of the disenfranchised political classes and elements of the national bourgeoisie.¹¹ Torriente was appointed to represent the movement in the US, believing that his diplomatic skills and connections with prominent American policy makers might prove decisive in the fight against the 'Machadista' dictatorship. Torriente's mission in the US was to mobilise American public opinion against the dictatorial regime, using various media to denounce their crimes, including implicating the regime in the assassination of Julio Antonio Mella. Torriente was further entrusted with establishing relations between the opposition and the State Department to delay or prevent a possible US military intervention in the event of a nationalist coup planned in August 1931.

While carrying out his diplomatic mission in the US, Torriente realised that important policy makers viewed a nationalist-led revolution as a manifestation of generalised anarchy in Cuba that could force a new military intervention. In response, Torriente changed his approach abandoning the strategy of support for a popular rebellion against Machado. Facing the prospects of foreign intervention (that he believed posed an even greater legitimacy crisis for the Republic and the general interests of the Cuban elites), he advocated for a different strategy of political mediation among established parties and groups. In a letter written on 15 December 1931 to the University Student Directorate, Torriente wrote,

I understand, as I have always understood, given Cuba's international position and the complexity of our problems, that much better than a revolution, which is always of dubious success, that we reach a 'consciousness' or a 'reconciliation' that allows a 'compromise' or 'agreement' that restores a just peace in the

Republic and the legal order destroyed since 1927 by the reigning situation. (Torriente y Peraza 1931: 233)

In that letter, he reminded the students that the Permanent Treaty authorised the US Government to militarily intervene. Taking into account the relative power of the two countries and Cuba's proximity of the US, Torriente recommended that Cubans not commit the error of attracting foreign intervention as had occurred in 1906 and 1917. At this juncture, Torriente appeared unable to resolve the contradiction that the Machado dictatorship had been sanctioned by US governments. Washington had tacitly approved his re-election and was unlikely to withdraw its support in the face of political instability. Thus, Torriente faced the difficult questions of how to dissuade students from joining the insurrections that could complicate the objective of forestalling intervention. The same question arose with respect to the debate among public intellectuals in the Nationalist Union in his letter of 21 February 1933. Torriente analysed the contradictions of Cuban politics stating that

The Republic of Cuba since its Foundation has always fluctuated between two great evils: the dictatorship, a political-social disease that corrodes the peoples of Spanish race in our America and foreign intervention, which is a result of the form and manner in which we obtained our independence (...). Dictatorial measures by some of our governments always brought as a logical consequence, and because revolutions have occurred so have foreign interventions. (Torriente y Peraza 1939a: 249)

But the broader meaning of his political thought is expressed when he warned his fellow public intellectuals in the movement that the greatest danger to their interests was losing power to the most radical sectors of society, which he associated with international communism writing that

I don't want to stop talking about revolution without warning that, currently, in the terrible state of misery that exists in the country, and with the annihilating doctrines maintained by those struggling between the opposition and the Government, at some point appeal to pent up social demands, and will run the risk, once the revolution is unleashed that it will be the red elements participating in the conflict who will most benefit. (Torriente y Peraza 1939a: 252–3)

In that letter, Torriente proposed political mediation by the US of the Cuban conflict, departing from his long-standing wariness of foreign meddling in the domestic affairs of Cuba. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration

would adopt this position. At that point, Torriente and José Rivero acted as spokesmen and supporters for this limited US role at the national level.

During the Government of 'National Unity', also known in Cuba as the Caffery-Batista – Mendieta government, Torriente served as Secretary of State and negotiated the abrogation of the Platt Amendment, replacing it with a Treaty of Relations Cuba–US and the new Treaty of Commercial Reciprocity of 1934¹² (Torriente y Peraza 1930; Rubio 1951b). In the fall of 1935, he returned to the League of Nations to negotiate Cuban debts. During that critical historical period, Torriente warned that to achieve national unity and peace, it was necessary to convene a Constituent Assembly that would represent the demands of the national bourgeoisie for a new Constitution. Torriente realised that the Government of 'National Unity' had created a vacuum of power that was being occupied by the military led by Batista. Aware of this situation and loathe to be implicated with the resurgence of military dictatorship, he resigned from the government and retired from formal political office.

The contradictions of Cuban constitutionalism

Batista's rise to power following the Revolution of 1933 represented an even greater repudiation of Torriente's doctrines. In 1935, Batista unleashed a wave of repression against opposition political parties after the failed worker strike of that year and the assassination of Antonio Guiteras. Torriente took steps to lead a genuine democratic transition. He harshly criticised the military command and made notable references to the totalitarian characteristics and purposes of the regime. He called on the military to be absolutely 'impartial in the political struggles' and above all, not to allow itself to be used as tools by anyone who 'intends to use them for his purposes personal or partisan, since in the long run this would turn them into another factor of political unrest which the Army Chief every day says he opposes' (Torriente y Peraza 1939a: 305).

In the aftermath of the 4th September coup, Batista implemented limited reforms with the goal of maintaining power (Torriente y Peraza 1939a: 313). He offered some limited political freedoms (such as legalising the Cuban Liberal Party that had been the stronghold of the Dictator Gerardo Machado) and called for a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution. Torriente foresaw that the concessions were insufficient for genuine constitutional democracy or rule of law. Torriente recognised Batista's dictatorial tendencies and refused an offer by Menocal to place him at the top of the candidates' list for the Constituent Assembly delegates for Havana (Torriente y Peraza 1939e: 305).

The re-energised support for Batista from traditional party elites as well as newer power contenders, including the Communist-Party-led National Confederation of Cuban Workers (CNOC), led Torriente to admonish public intellectuals and the

political classes that those collaborating with Batista would be ‘overwhelmed by old and die-hard supporters of the dictatorship’¹³ (Torriente y Peraza 1939a: 313). He alerted Cubans about the threat the Liberal party and the dictatorship posed to genuine democratisation and warned ‘the country to see that, little by little, numerous people who blindly backed the reaction or inspired it are gaining positions of great importance’ (Torriente y Peraza 1941: XXXVI). At the end, he concluded that the Constitution of 1940 was for Batista merely a bridge for his re-election that same year. With regard to the implications of the 1940 elections, he reasoned that Batista’s political manipulations of national political life and elections would produce a dysfunctional constitutional democracy.¹⁴ Thus, Torriente wrote,

Abandoning the ideal of democracy and freedom by many who did not care about it (...), led to the atomization of the electoral body; and thus, the designation of delegates to the Constituent Assembly which met in 1940, that took part in the process (represented) a dozen parties. In that state of political disintegration, elections were staged immediately after for all offices from the President of the Republic down to the local levels. All this produced a defective Constitution and a disjointed and ineffective legislative and governmental organization. ... In my humble opinion (...) the political situation of Cuba is extremely grave. (Torriente y Peraza 1951a: 106–7)

Torriente turned his focus to international affairs, perhaps discouraged by turns in domestic politics. During the 1940–46 period, he presided over the Cuban-American Relief Fund for the Allies. The latter private institution collected relatively high donations from fund-raising events offered by Americans and Cubans. In just some 20 months following its founding, the Fund had already collected about 115,960.98 dollars.

In 1941, Torriente served as President of the Cuban Commission that organised the Second American Conference of National Commissions for Intellectual Cooperation held in Havana. The conference aimed to assist scientific researchers, artists, scholars and exiled teachers fleeing the war in Europe; condemned fascism as a threat to intellectual freedom, and approved the establishment of an International Centre for Intellectual Cooperation in the Americas that would serve the objectives of the International Institute of intellectual cooperation in Paris (as long as France remained under German occupation). This Parisian institution had been founded in 1926 with the support of the League of Nations and the French Government providing financial resources and a magnificent palace as the permanent headquarters. In order to provide continuity to the legacy of the Centre, Torriente and others dedicated enormous efforts with the support of leading intellectuals from throughout the Americas that culminated in the creation of the America’s branch of the French International Centre with Havana as the headquarters.

At the end of the Second World War, Torriente became President of the Cuban Commission of United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Cuban Association of the United Nations (ACNU) and led major efforts to achieve recognition of the Regional Center of Havana as the host of the first UNESCO conference in December 1950. At the fifth plenary of the Federation of World of Associations of the United Nations held in Switzerland, the US backed a proposal to name Torriente as its Honorary President. During those years, he served as President of the joint Cuban and American society of medical research.

Between 1940 and 1952, Torriente's role was most clearly manifested in his essays in the magazine he founded and edited, the *Havana Review* (1942–47) that aimed to influence public opinion on important national and international issues. According to the historian, Félix Lizaso, the Review was a bastion 'against the threatening totalitarianisms of the times'. The publication, founded and directed by Torriente beginning in September 1942, sought to pay homage to the magazine of the same name directed by nationalists Rafael María Mendive and José de Jesús Quintiliano García during the period 1853–56. The Review was published monthly for a period of five years during which time it addressed issues of national importance ranging from national and international politics to economic and commercial topics, agriculture, science, education, literature and history.

Torriente's articles in the post-war period clearly expressed his continued commitment to the equality of states and the pre-eminence of international laws and organisations, importantly the United Nations, in mediating interstate conflicts. He criticised the allied powers for arrogating to themselves veto power in the Security Council which he believed contrary to the aims of the Dumbarton Oaks Conference and the international principle of the equality of states.

Torriente's determination not to return to politics was communicated on 16 March 1943 to Ramón Grau San Martín, leader of the Autentico Party (PRC), explaining the reasons he could not accept the nomination as Vice President of the Republic in elections to be held in June 1944 (Torriente y Peraza 1951c: 209). In 1951, the ACNU sponsored a national conference to pay tribute to Torriente on the occasion of his being elected Honorary President of the World Federation of Associations of the United Nations. During that year, various acts of recognition took place, including the unveiling of a bust of Torriente by sculptor Juan J. Sicre in Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines; the appointment of Doctor Honoris Causa by the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law at the University of Havana; the award by the President of the Republic Carlos Prío, of the Grand Cross of the order Lanuza; as well as the Medal of distinguished service by the Cuban armed forces (Rodríguez Mesa 1951: 36).

Batista coup, the legitimacy crisis and the Revolution of 1958

Torriente correctly understood that the Fulgencio Batista coup of March 1952 represented the most significant crisis of legitimacy for bourgeois democracy in Cuba. Batista shredded the Constitution of 1940 that he had been instrumental in creating in his Bonapartist ambitions. Initially, the traditional political parties were unable to mount an effective resistance to this assault on constitutional legality. The political initiative resisting the dictatorship devolved on public intellectuals and the most enlightened interest of the national bourgeoisie, under the umbrella movement of the Sociedad de Amigos de la Republica (SAR).

Torriente was once again called to public service in the interests of the Republic. Under the leadership of Torriente, SAR warned about the political dangers of that moment to political order and stability. Torriente's first statements condemned the coup on 26th March and warned that the military should not involve itself in disputes between political factions. Torriente wrote that

I have always been opposed to the armed forces' involvement in political struggles, and for that reason to coups or military uprisings, because they never produce favorable outcomes, however small and always led to results that would best have been achieved in other ways without the terrible consequences. (Ibarra Guitart 2003a: 16–7)

Torriente appealed for public support to lead a national protest against the dictatorship, calling on all concerned people and political parties for concerted non-violent action against the regime stating that 'While pursuing all possible agreements, I advise citizens to keep calm and to allow time for those who are acting even at the levels of policy' (Ibarra y Guitart, 2003: 81). He aspired to achieve a mediated solution to the political crisis in a manner that would restore democratic legitimacy inspiring confidence and respect in the political institutions of the Republic. In that manner, the potential disruptions from below could be averted, and the credibility of political parties and leaders could be affirmed. Between the months of March and May, he made statements in various public arenas questioning the capacity of the opposition forces to challenge the military-backed dictatorship with armed confrontations. Instead, he advanced the thesis that it was necessary to advance a mediated constitutional path as an alternative to dictatorship and revolutionary violence stating that

I understand that if Cuba is to escape the present morass in which it is inserted, and from which it can disappear as a civilized and progressive society, entering a stage of violence and disaster without parallel, then we must soon return to constitutional life. (Torriente y Peraza 1952b: 492)

Torriente's proposals calling for new elections at all levels of government and the creation of a transitional government providing guarantees for legal political activities by all political parties were delivered at the Open University to a large audience sympathetic to the restoration of democratic rule. Torriente shaped his message to overcome the conflicts between the major rival political movements – the *Ortodoxo* and *Autentico* parties – calling on them to reflect on their long-term interests in stability and to work together to restore democratic institutions. These early efforts led by Torriente were undercut by Secretary of the Presidency, Acosta Rubio charged with dismissing any possible negotiations with the SAR stating that

I don't think anyone from the Government, nor the other responsible sectors of the country believe your declarations add anything to your credit in this call to the discord, including civil war, after so many years of guilty silence. (Torriente y Peraza 1952a: 69–70)

On 14 November 1952, the SAR restructured its Board of Directors re-electing Torriente as President. In March 1953, the SAR went on the offensive criticising the Batista government's announcement of a plan to add to the Constitution provisions of Supreme Court ruling legitimising the coup of 1952. Torriente and the SAR counterproposed that the government convene general elections for president and Congress in 1954 with effective electoral protections and guarantees agreed to by the government and the opposition. The SAR proposal was disregarded by the government, which continued its preparations to carry out electoral fraud.

In June 1953, Torriente launched a new mediation process that he hoped would unite the opposition behind Carlos Mendieta, former President of the Republic. Torriente had played a similar role in support of Carlos Mendieta, during the Revolution of 1933, when he dramatically warned about the dangers of radicalisation of the Cuban social protest. Torriente's initiative found support in the opposition unified around the goal of a peaceful mediation and transition of power. The efforts were led by veterans of the independence Mendieta and Torriente, along with other prominent Republic figures, such as Ricardo Núñez Portuondo, Gustavo Cuervo Rubio, Raúl Menocal, Enrique Recio and Raúl Cárdenas. The initiative was also supported by Ramón Grau San Martín and Guillermo Alonso Pujol.

The role of spoiler of the mediation was assigned to Andrés Morales de Castillo, Secretary of the Presidency under Batista who denounced the incipient alliance declaring that 'the Government will institute elections which have been convened with or without the pronouncement of Colonel Mendieta'. Meanwhile,

Santiago Rey (Batista's Minister of Interior) in a press interview announced that 'there is nothing to advise changes or modifications of our political plans, which are unchanged (...) If the opposition parties do not want to participate, we will go alone' (*Bohemia* 1953: 69).

Batista and his government effectively repudiated these first attempts at political mediation. It was evident to most observers, however, that the regime had little popular support and could not succeed in a clean election. It appeared that Batista intended to manoeuvre the opposition parties into a rigged election for local officials and representatives. Confident in holding the reins of power, Batista expected the opposition to respond deferentially. Torriente was aware that by conceding to Batista's tactics that the opposition would at best get a few political crumbs, but no political power while losing credibility as being co-opted by the dictatorship. Torriente and the SAR leadership understood that holding unfair elections could not alleviate the tense situation and end the legitimacy crisis, but instead would inevitably bring revolutionary violence.

The first outbreak of rebellion occurred with the assault on the Moncada barracks on 26 July 1953 under the leadership of Fidel Castro. A new revolutionary power contender entered the public arena with Fidel Castro's announcing his aims in his speech 'History Will Absolve Me'. The event marked the start of a significant rupture between the traditional parties and a younger generation of Cubans turning to revolution in order to bring significant changes in the country. By 1954, following the call for elections by the Batista regime, Torriente took the position followed by most of the opposition parties abstaining from elections.

In May 1955, the SAR again sought to take the political initiative from the dictatorship after the amnesty of political prisoners and the formal restoration of the Constitution of 1940. The SAR convened a group of opposition leaders with the task of achieving a unified front. After an initial exchange of views, the leadership selected Torriente to lead the initiative. Torriente then prepared a series of manifestos constituting a *de facto* political platform for unity among various groups. The first document dated 3rd June rejected the elections that had taken place in 1954, while ruling out political violence to restore democracy summoning all social forces to a 'civilized understanding' through a call for new elections.

Under Torriente, the SAR functioned as part of a larger group of 'public intellectuals' acutely aware of the long-term interests of the bourgeoisie, and able to foresee with a high degree of acumen the events which in the future could affect the interests of this class as a whole. As the leading voices of the political thought of public intellectuals, Torriente and his right hand in the SAR, José Miró Cardona, advanced for war – looking economic policy reforms. They foresaw the danger to the interests of the propertied classes and liberal democratisers represented by the prerevolutionary conditions. The Torriente manifesto stressed

that Cuba ‘must avoid that misery will call on all, driving men to anarchy or civil disobedience. We are at the moment to find the path to conciliation’ (Torriente y Peraza 1955a).

The manifestations of the crisis of public institutions, the tensions rooted in social problems, and the emergence of strong revolutionary tendencies in the masses were perceived as combining to produce profound social upheavals. The SAR leadership was aware of these dangers and aimed to avoid the consequences of this confluence of events. But the regime, represented by the Minister of the Interior, Santiago Rey, rejected the SAR proposals leading Miro Cardona to lament, ‘we want to prevent the collapse of our institutions. But the Minister of the Interior has used words of disdain to characterize the pursuit of public service that guides the friends of the Republic’ (Torriente y Peraza 1955b). Similarly, Torriente, on 6 September 1955 in a ceremony at the Habana Lions Club, publicly described Batista as a dictator ignorant of the laws of the country questioning

which provisions of the Constitution, I wonder, what precepts of the revolutionary constitutions, which prescriptions of general law provides that one man can alter at will the political organization in the country, without being considered a dictator or a tyrant? (Torriente y Peraza 1955^a July 21 1955)

Despite the self-evident conclusion that the dictatorship was not about to collapse because of these public criticisms, Torriente clearly recognised the depth of the crisis of the political order posed by the authoritarian nature of the Batista regime. Torriente held firm to the position that the use of violence should be avoided, even as the emerging revolutionary organisations turned to it as the means to overthrow the regime and transform Cuban society. The SAR continued to seek a negotiated resolution, while strengthening the political institutions and parties within the Cuban Republic, never consenting to the revolutionary path. Its ultimate aim was to achieve an order of things that would enable the established political parties and bourgeoisie to win legitimacy and contain a revolution from below. Torriente clearly perceived that if the demands of the SAR continued to be ignored by the regime it was closing off any hope for a political settlement via general elections legitimising the position of those Cubans who favoured a social revolution. Batista did not adhere to the SAR admonitions, refusing to make concessions and thought to avert revolution through repression and by political and economic manoeuvring.

Torriente’s mediation of the crisis ran afoul of the realities of Cold War politics. Unlike the mediation process in 1933, the US did not exert diplomatic pressures in favour of a negotiated solution to the Cuban political crisis. This came to light in the controversy between Torriente and the American journalist Drew

Pearson following Torriente's speech at the Lions Club. Pearson had opined that there were democratic freedoms in Cuba and gave as an example Torriente's ability to harshly criticise Batista without suffering grave consequences. The SAR leader responded that 'you unwittingly have become the spokesman that the American people will most likely listen to favorable to General Batista'. Torriente's displeasure at the indifference shown by Washington at the repeated violations of the Constitution of 1940 was balanced by his hopes that the American press would influence public opinion against the abuses of the dictatorship, so as to assist the mediation efforts. Yet Torriente and the SAR proved unable to change the media portrayal of the dictatorship. Torriente lamented this state of affairs in conversation with another veteran of the War of 1895, Enrique Castillo Loynaz, stating that

the American people sincerely love democracy, what happens is that the people are poorly informed of what is happening in Latin America. If the people knew the horrors committed by dictatorships, it would be on our side and the policy of the Department of State would have to change its policies. ('Biblioteca Nacional "Jose Martí"' n.d.: 87)

Torriente's declarations were repudiated by the regime including Batista through his spokesperson Andrés Morales del Castillo who mocked Torriente, claiming that he needed to demonstrate that he spoke for a united opposition before being an intermediary with his Government. In response to those criticisms, the SAR decided to call all opposition sectors to publicly reiterate their support for his leadership and the blueprint for solving Cuban political problems. The SAR movement's support for Torriente's mediation was expressed in a public event in the square of the Muelle de Luz on 19 November 1955. The gathering showed the capacity of the public intellectuals associated with reform to mobilise a broad coalition to support constitutionalism and rule of law, despite the evident ruptures that would occur in the mediation process.

The breadth of support for Torriente's mediation was evidenced by Fidel Castro's declaration from New York in 1955 asserting that his group was not opposed to an orderly resolution to the national crisis, provided that full guarantees were provided so that the regime would not be perpetuated in power claiming that

If there were the possibility to have a peaceful resolution to the crisis, then we have a formula: immediate general elections without Batista. Let him renounce the Presidency and hand over power to Don Cosme de la Torriente! What Cuban would not agree with this solution?

Castro also understood that if the dictatorship failed to respond to the SAR, then the SAR will need to turn to civil resistance, or otherwise it would lack all credibility at this stage and would have to face being 'discredited' (Cubillas 1955: 83).

The public event at the 'Muelle de Luz' was attended by all the opposition political parties with the exception of the communist Popular Socialist Party, which was excluded from a formal role but was present at the proceedings.¹⁵ Torriente's speech to the gathering took a conservative position on the more radical anti-imperialist demands articulated by sectors on the political left ('Biblioteca Nacional "José Martí"' n.d.). He maintained a conciliatory attitude with respect to the US (probably because he still hoped to influence US policy towards the dictatorship) and no doubt because of his favourable views of the US tracing back to the War of Independence. His cautious posture was manifested in relation to the limited role assigned to the revolutionary sectors as evident in his refusal to read a letter that Fidel Castro sent from exile to be read at the event (Hart 2004: 120–4). Nonetheless, the regime characterised the event as subversive and with unusual cynicism Batista responded that 'we are seriously thinking that we do damage to the people by not being a dictator (...). We need to keep our muscles taut for action to save the Republic of debauchery and from the abyss' (Bohemia 1955: 79).

Batista's declarations backfired. The FEU (Federation of University Students) under the leadership of José Antonio Echeverría responded to Batista by calling on the SAR to radicalise its position.¹⁶ In a letter to Torriente, Echeverría stated,

Last November 19 under the patronage of the Society of Friends of the Republic we celebrated a great public act which was yearned for and demanded by the citizens (...). Therefore, the FEU believes that the already mobilized public opinion clearly demonstrated in that event, is prepared for the SAR, the political parties, civic institutions and those embodying the revolutionary struggle, to join into a movement with the goal of freedom and armed struggle. (Bohemia 1955)

The student Board of the FEU decided to organise a demonstration in order to bring to Torriente's office a letter reaffirming their support for revolution. The demonstration was convened on 2nd December and turned into an armed confrontation between police and students. It was then decided that a small command directed by Luis Blanca would personally deliver the letter to Torriente in his law firm. Torriente responded to José Antonio (who was arrested for involvement in the demonstration) on 2nd December writing that

I understand the impatience and admire the rebelliousness of youth. As (youth) represents the future of the nation, it must not be destroyed or trampled without

chance of success in a revolutionary firestorm (...). Avoiding days of mourning has been one of the decisive reasons inspiring the SAR. That is why it insists on a political solution and intends to use all the means authorized under the Constitution of the Republic for the defense of the rights of citizens. Waiting is a way to overcome, said the Apostle of our freedoms (...). Patience. It is the counsel of peace from one who has waged war. (Bohemia 1956: 33)

Torriente consistently adhered to the SAR's positions. The movement had not been established as a means to revolutionise the country, but rather to avoid revolution. His liberal democratic conception of the Cuban crisis would restrain his moving beyond the electoral path, fearing that a profound social revolution would dramatically alter class relations and bring about a major reaction on the part of the US with grave consequences for Cuban sovereignty.

From 2nd December, Cuban politics was radicalised, and the support for revolutionary protest deepened. Starting in December 1955, large-scale social protests led by workers in the sugar industry over payment of the wage differential shook the foundations of the dictatorship due to the depth of the popular insurrection. Student demonstrations led by the FEU at the end of December 1955 aligned student protestors with the sugar workers strike attesting to a shift away from the reformist-mediated path advocated by the SAR. These developments added urgency to mediation as Torriente's fear of mass action was heightened by student involvement with workers. The defeat of the sugar workers' strike somewhat dampened Batista interest in Torriente's mediation as state repression seemed to have been successful. Batista, however, accepted negotiations with Torriente to gain time to change his public image and fading international support and to deflect the revolutionary effervescence that had been tamped down but not eliminated by state repression.

Under those conditions, and in light of the regime's delaying tactics, Fidel Castro declared that the 'arrogance and outright rejection of the one hundred thousand citizens gathered at the Muelle de Luz, shows that there is no alternative for the country than the revolution'. Batista attempted to deflect attention from the legitimacy crisis and the growing repression by agreeing to meet with Torriente to discuss the mediation process. The first interview was conducted on 27th December, with Batista suggesting government-appointed commissions and the opposition proposing immediate political changes. The regime, however, denounced immediate elections. This made manifest Batista's intent to use mediation as an instrument to appease the revolutionary resistance. However, the FEU refused to join these latest negotiations of the SAR stating their position in the letter addressed to Torriente on 2nd December (Bohemia 1955).

After Torriente's meeting with the leadership of the opposition parties, it was agreed that Torriente's second interview with Batista on 10th January should seek agreement to the opposition demands for elections before appointing the commissioners from the government and the opposition. At that meeting, Torriente agreed to the appointment of the commissioners postponing until a later moment the question of the date and type of elections to be convened. Torriente, who was ill at the time and increasingly frail, was unable to use his considerable diplomatic skills to obtain the desired results. Unable to deliver on what had been agreed with the opposition leaders, a disappointed SAR base wavered in support for the mediation talks. The dictator had succeeded in driving a wedge between Torriente and the SAR leadership avoiding the need to make a more fundamental political decision, thus gaining time and to weaken the opposition.

In the aftermath of the second Torriente–Batista meeting, the opposition political parties were reluctant to participate further in the process. Torriente returned to Batista to ask for greater assurances about the general elections. The latter, in a disingenuous letter, wrote that he understood the need to hold general elections before 1958 but that he could not decide the matter on his own 'as a matter of responsibility and delicacy' (*Prensa Libre* 1956a). At this juncture, Torriente advised the opposition that they should agree to participate in the mediation and appoint commissioners, interpreting Batista's assertion that he had given tacit approval to hold general elections. Torriente further argued that if the opposition withdrew from the negotiations, they could be blamed for their failure. If they agreed but were met with the regime's repudiation of immediate elections, the blame for the collapsed mediation would fall on the government. Torriente added, 'I warn you, gentlemen, that if you don't make the designations as I have suggested, that I am finished with the negotiations (...). With discussion nothing is lost' (*Prensa Libre* 1956a: 39).

The opposition, most notably the Ortodoxo Party, insisted on greater proof of Batista's intent to hold elections and restore constitutional order. Responding to its more revolutionary base, the party demanded more compelling gestures from the regime before appointing the commissioners such as the curtailment of police repression. The negotiations entered a serious impasse, testing Torriente's statesmanship. The veteran spared no effort to prevent the stalling of the negotiations. In a letter to opposition leaders, he acknowledged the deterioration of the political situation and appealed to the self-preservation interests of the opposition parties warning them of the danger that loomed over the Republic:

This situation (...) has stalled the course of negotiations, with serious implications for the country that is once again beset by the darkest omens. But convinced of

the necessity to avoid a new and painful effusion of blood, to save the youthful forces of the country, and prevent economic collapse, I have insistently requested of the members of this society – who understand it is necessary to overcome all the difficulties up to now and those which may arise in the future – to find a decent formula to solve this problem. (Prensa Libre 1956b: 2 cols 4 y 5)

The growing economic crisis, rising unemployment and the growing restlessness complicated a negotiated settlement among political factions. Torriente feared that the confluence of youth rebelliousness and insurgency combined could lead to the collapse of the Republican institutions. But in a momentous turn of events, days after he sent this letter to the opposition, the SAR leadership decided to appoint the joint commission to participate in a ‘civic dialogue’.

The ‘civic dialogue’ began on 5 March 1956 at the Continental House of Culture in Habana with Torriente presiding. From its inception, the dialogue was divided into two opposing theses – the opposition called for immediate general elections with full constitutional guarantees, while the Government Commissioners were in favour of calling a constituent assembly. For most of the opposition, the regime’s proposal was generally perceived to be a delaying tactic to ignore their demands for immediate elections. The SAR and the political parties’ aim to restore constitutional order renewing the institutions of the Republic depended on the regime’s agreeing to that specific demand. If they accepted the regime’s proposal of local elections only, they would undermine their movement’s claim to represent the best interest of society. Any outcome that kept Batista in power would likely fall short of averting a social revolution.

The impasse was unresolved at the fourth session of the civic dialogue. The gridlock led a disappointed Torriente to rebuke the commissioners’ lack of progress declaring that

our people are tired of endless arguments without arriving at any solution (...). Cuba deserves every one of us to seclude ourselves behind closed doors and spend an hour or as much time as it takes to find a solution within ourselves to this problem, looking towards the future, once we find it (the solution), we will again meet. For my part, I now suspend the session. (Ibarra Guitart 2003: 132–3)

The radical path seemed more imminent to Torriente as the political initiative passed from the established groups that had dominated the Republic to the emerging revolutionary organisations.

In mid-August 1956, Torriente suggested to the opposition parties that they should take advantage of several provisions of Batista’s *Plan Vento* calling for

reforms of the electoral procedures without announcing an election time line, but maintaining the option to withdraw from the mediation if the regime did not subsequently agree to immediate general elections with full political guarantees. Torriente's proposal had to overcome many obstacles within the movement. Both the Ortodoxo and Autentico parties were opposed to the latter favouring abstention from the process. Batista's proposal had shattered the coherence of the political groups within the SAR. Although all opposition parties had been unified in support of the original principles of the SAR, they now took different stances. The *Plan Vento* accomplished precisely what Batista had hoped—disunity among his opponents and collapse of the movement.

After the *Civic Dialogue*, the traditional opposition parties continued to strive for unity around the demands of the SAR. The SAR's collapse left a vacuum for a mediated restoration of constitutional democracy. On 8 December 1956, a few days after the landing of the 'Granma', Torriente, the veteran of the wars of independence and renowned statesman, died. In his last will and testament, given to the notary Lincoln Roldon, Torriente pleaded for Cubans to 'unite and meet to accomplish what Government and opposition must do. Justice and rule of law. When you meet, remember me and my teachings. Forget your self-interests and think about Cuba' (*El Mundo* 1956: A-4, col. 2).

Conclusions

The article provides qualified support for the theoretical insights of Moore and Gramsci on the role of the bourgeoisie in democratic development in late developing countries. The dependent character of the Cuban bourgeoisie blocked its ability to carry out the function of national democratic development that could consolidate and legitimise its role as a leading class in politics and society. Public intellectuals attempted to create conditions for hegemony in this context by mediating conflicts among classes and groups and by providing models for a democratic-reform agenda, including honest government, fair elections and respect for international law and organisations. The career of Torriente illustrates the important role of public intellectuals in the defence of constitutional rule. Torriente represented the aspirations of the more enlightened political elites for a more democratic, autonomous and reformist development.¹⁷ Throughout his political career, Torriente along with other public intellectuals provided a coherent analysis of the crisis and contradictions facing the Republic developing arguments and pragmatic approaches and leading political movements to deal with them.

A nationalist and reformist third path between dictatorship and revolution resonated among sectors of the more progressive bourgeoisie and elements of the

political class. In the end, political variables not fully accounted for by Moore and Gramsci combined to change the trajectory of Cuban politics towards a socialist revolution. One of those variables was the international context. From the Revolution of 1895–98 to the landing of the ‘Granma’, the legitimacy of Cuba’s first and second Republics was overshadowed by events and short-sighted policies under the Platt Amendment and subsequently the Cold War policies during the Batista dictatorship fuelled cynicism towards Cuban political institutions. Among the most significant policies were the unfortunate and (in Torriente’s view) counterproductive US interventions in Cuban politics under the Platt Amendment. Another was the US preoccupation with communism in the hemisphere during the Cold War that led to its neglecting abuses of dictatorships in the region.

Other political variables that intervened in the Cuban context were the parasitic nature of the Cuban state and political institutions, especially the political parties during the Second Republic. The widespread corruption of the political elites undermined the claims of public intellectuals for bourgeois hegemony. The intransigence of the political classes as evidenced in the Batista dictatorship and the uncompromising posture of the dictator and the regime’s closest allies in the face of peaceful opposition proved decisive in the unravelling of the political order. The inability of Torriente’s vision and that of other reformists to take root and ripen in Cuban soil was one of the main factors which closed the doors on a democratic-reform path to change.¹⁸ The reformists had aimed to provide political space within the framework of bourgeois democracy for excluded power contenders to participate in the country’s political life, thereby avoiding their political alignment with the emerging revolutionary organisations. When that failed, the political initiative devolved to the revolutionary forces and to social forces – the rural working class, the marginalised urban sectors, Afro Cubans and others – that culminated in the triumph of the socialist revolution as many Cubans concluded that the country had exhausted its options under dependent capitalism.

Notes

1. The Platt Amendment to the Cuban Constitution was a requirement of the McKinley administration to transfer sovereignty to Cuba. It was a logical outcome of two major objectives of the US as an emerging empire. First was to establish a strategic base in the Caribbean to protect the projected Panama Canal and the trade route it represented. Article VI provided the US the right to construct a naval base on the Island at Guantánamo. From the perspective of the Cubans, including Torriente, Article III of the Amendment was most problematic to Cuban sovereignty by providing the US the right to intervene in Cuban politics ‘for the preservation of Cuban independence,

the maintenance of government adequate for the protection of life, property and individual liberty ...' It was aimed at providing the political stability required for economic development and investments in the Island, which led to repeated interventions in Cuban politics undermining the legitimacy of the Republic (Lane 1972: 325). Torriente's career as a diplomat was dedicated to the objective of its abrogation. His concrete actions towards that end are discussed in this article.

2. The Union Nacionalista (UN) was a political movement of segments of the old parties representing in large part the interests of the sugar bourgeoisie tied to foreign interests. The UN was led by Mario García Menocal, Carlos Mendieta, Cosme de la Torriente in opposition to the Machado dictatorship. It represented an alliance of 'outs' excluded from power by the Machadato. Torriente's contribution to the UN was to lead efforts to convince the US to intervene against Machado, and, failing that, to obtain enough pressure on Machado to force him to open up the political and legal arena to electoral contestation. Torriente led one effort before the Supreme Court to legally challenge the Machado regime. It could be argued that its influence was limited by the contradictory character of the UN alliance, which led to divisions in their goals and tactics. Its influence was also limited by the fact that the emerging industrial bourgeois and sectors of the state and bureaucracy benefitting from the regime's import substitution policies aligned with the authoritarian regime (Benjamin 1977: 78).
3. The US was reluctant to support Cuban insurgents as belligerents in the independence war with Spain. In his 1897 inaugural address, President McKinley said, 'we want no wars of conquest' with respect to a possible intervention in Cuba. The sinking of the Battleship Maine in February 1898 precipitated the war, but the underlying causes of the war were found in America's turn to an imperial role in the 1890s requiring a different policy on the Cuban conflict. In effect, violence in Cuba 'created a spectacle of an America unable to master affairs close to home' with potential to undercut its ability to project its new ambitions for a global role (Gould 1982: 50).
4. The political frictions between the Provisional Government and the General in Chief involved the civil-military relationship in the Revolution. Its immediate causes were the limits that the Provisional Government sought to place on the conduct of the war effort. Torriente played a significant role as a mediator trying to reconcile the divisions that he believed weakened the belligerents. On the question of state power and more specifically the role of the military, it appears from his actions at the La Yaya constitutional convention that he was wary of the caudillismo, which represented a retrograde form of rule incompatible with the long-term interests of the bourgeois.
5. Torriente's thought on the importance of Cuba's international personality is found in Lugo-Viña's *Un Internacionalista representativo*, emphasising that he consistently related the expansion of Cuba's international presence to the misguided Platt Amendment that he opposed and sought to abolish through his diplomatic missions affirming that 'Cuba is and by rights should be free and independent' (Lugo-Viña 1924: 95).
6. In October 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt ordered a second military occupation of Cuba to quell a political uprising against the government of President Estrada y Palma citing the right of intervention under Clause III of the Platt Amendment to secure 'life, liberty and property' when the Cuban government was unable to do so.

America's reluctant intervention in 1906 was provoked by partisan conflicts among the veterans of the war based largely on disputes over state patronage. Both President Estrada y Palma and his Liberal opponents appealed to the Platt Amendment – asking for US support. The Liberals having lost the 1906 presidential election due to voter fraud and intimidation hoped the US intervention would produce better terms for the party and its supporters. The practical effect was to change the meaning of Article III of the Amendment (Thomas 1971).

7. The doctrine of 'domestic virtue' in the Republic came from noted public intellectuals and gained some acceptance among the population. It can be understood to have elements in common with Barrington Moore's bourgeois ethos – support for representative democracy, an end to party and state political corruption, respect for free and fair elections, defence of civil liberties. In Cuba, the proponents were advocates of liberal thought who deployed these doctrines to remedy political and institutional conditions that produced US military interventions under the Platt Amendment. While these doctrines were subject to different interpretation, they served as an ideological platform for those who hoped for political stability and a relative state autonomy from foreign meddling while accepting the parameters set by the Island's economic dependence on the US. Among its most noted proponents were Raymundo Cabrera, Rafael Martínez Ortiz and Manuel Márquez Sterling. The latter best defined the thesis in his article 'La Nación' published on February 1917 (Sterling 1985: 525–30).
8. Cuban society was changing rapidly during the first two decades after independence with the growth of foreign-owned large-scale sugar mills concentrating sugar workers into enclaves giving rise to new social forces in politics, including colono (small property owners and renters) and labour movements, although it was not until the 1920s that economic crisis and political repression under the administrations of Alfredo Zayas and Gerardo Machado under the Cuban National Confederation of Labor and the Habana Labor Federation that the labour movement is mobilised and organised as a political actor (Domínguez 1978: 50; McGillivray 2009: 151).
9. Torriente's appointment as Ambassador was probably due to President Alfredo Zayas' pursuit of greater autonomy in its dealings with the US by having a respected nationalist opposed to the Platt Amendment as the Island's leading diplomat in Washington. The political crisis caused by post-World War I collapse of sugar prices and partisan conflicts during the presidential election cycle of 1921 led to US interference in Cuba during the Zayas administration. The US agreed to support Zayas financially and politically with the condition that the latter accept US envoy Enoch Crowder vetting of Zayas' Cabinet and approving administrative decisions. Zayas' government was under attack from political opponents who chafed at its corruption, including the appointment of twelve of the President's relatives to high posts on Customs (nephew), Public Works (brother), the Department of Interior (nephew), sub-Treasury (nephew) and the national lottery (son; *New York Times* 1922). Crowder imposed a 'moral cabinet' on President Zayas while working to 'stabilize' the Island's economy. A few months later, Zayas was forced to accept the demands of J.P. Morgan via the State Department for the creating of a commission acceptable to the US to administer a new loan and the revenues pledged to its repayment (Benjamin 1979: 23).

10. Torriente's character traits predisposed him as a public intellectual to play for the most part the role of grand strategist and architect behind the scenes as he did in the political mediations of the 1930s and 1950s, while others did the political grunt work. His tendency was to renounce office when his ideas and proposals came under partisan questioning, preferring to engaging in long and arduous debates with others. This trait was less evident in his diplomatic missions in the US and League of Nations. Torriente felt more at ease in that more rarefied world of diplomacy and apparently managed the rough and tumble of international diplomacy with aplomb.
11. Research on the social and economic basis of the opposition to Machado remains to be done. The literature generally characterises the disputes as purely political rooted in the exclusion from power of segments of the traditional political parties by the dictatorship. We suggest that it would be worthwhile to explore the ties between the emerging industrial bourgeoisie sponsored by the Machado import substitution industrialisation strategies and the failure of a bourgeois ethos to establish hegemony.
12. Cuban representatives to the negotiations of the 1934 Treaty of Reciprocity in which Torriente played a principal role advocating for an agreement including broad trade concessions on the part of the US for a more favourable treatment of the Cuban sugar quota and lowering US tariffs on Cuban exports. The US position of the US delegation, however, prevailed and Cuba relented in the face of the economic crisis facing the Island during the Great Depression. Luis Perez has argued that the final outcome led to a less favourable treaty than the Treaty of Reciprocity negotiated in 1903 (Perez 1988: 280).
13. The Communist Party was founded on 16 August 1925 by Carlos Baliño y Julio Antonio Mella. It adopted the 'united front' strategy of the Communist International in favour of alliances between the working classes and the national bourgeoisie. Concretely, in the period under discussion, it advocated an alliance with the conservative forces represented by Batista. The CNOC for the most part became an extension of the Communist Party once the repression against the anarchists largely removed their influence. In 1939, Batista legalised union, a development that led to the founding of the CTC (Confederation of Cuban Workers).
14. Torriente perceived the Constituent Assembly of 1940 as flawed due to the role of Batista in framing it to divide the opposition through provisions that would multiply the number of small political parties. He was, furthermore, sceptical of the alliance between Batista and the Liberal Party sectors that had backed Machado.
15. The Communist Party (which had become the Popular Socialist Party in the late 1940s) was excluded from the public gathering at Muelle de la Luz in large measure due to Torriente's influence; he was an avowed anti-communist suspicious of the motivations of the party in joining with the opposition. Prior to the Muelle de la Luz protest, he made public pronouncements that the communist representatives to the meeting were Kremlin emissaries and publicly rejected their inclusion in the programme, although he did not oppose their attending as part of the general public. Furthermore, in light of his extensive experience in diplomacy and intimate knowledge of American politics and foreign policies, he likely understood that in a robust communist party presence at the event would raise alarms in the State Department and undercut whatever opportunity might exist to enlist US support for the democratic opposition to Batista.

16. The FEU (Federation of University Students) was founded in 1922 by Julio Antonio Mella, which was a student organisation with an active and influential role in Cuba politics. In 1954, José Antonio Echeverría became its president and led the grouping into a direct confrontation and challenge to the Batista regime. He was killed on 13 March 1957 leading an assault to overthrow the regime by taking over the Presidential Palace as a prelude to a mass popular uprising against the dictatorship.
17. The reformist alternative supported by public intellectuals associated with Torriente's political thought encapsulated the principles of the bourgeois ethos in Cuban politics of absolute respect for democratic institutions and processes as embodied in the Constitution of 1940, an end to corruption in government and politics, advancing the social gains and welfare state created in the 1940s, strengthening the national economy within a framework of capitalist development. This reformist alternative meant continuing the advances of the previous decades without dismantling capitalism as occurred after 1959.
18. Perez-Stable in 'Reflections on Political Possibilities: Cuba's Peaceful Transition That Wasn't, (1954-1958)' emphasises the role of leadership, mostly the failure of the SAR leadership to produce a leader able to appeal to the mobilised civil society in early 1955 and to enlist it in support of the mediated solution. She speculates that a different outcome could have been produced had a leader emerged with a more inclusive 'vision' such as Luis Muñoz Marín at the head of the reform forces more able to appeal to Cuban youth increasingly supportive of Fidelista-led revolution (Perez-Stable 1998).

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