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“TAMPA, ALTAR OF SPAIN”: A SPANISH REPUBLICAN VIEW OF TAMPA IN THE 1930S

by Marcelino Domingo

Translation and introduction by Ana Varela-Lago*

[Introduction: The commitment of the Tampa community to help the Spanish Republic during the 1930s made an impression on several of the Republican representatives who visited the city under the auspices of the Tampa Democratic Popular Committee to Aid Spain and the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy. Some of them, like Marcelino Domingo, mentioned Tampa in their memoirs of the war years. A teacher, journalist, politician, and author, Marcelino Domingo was one of the most prominent figures of the Republic to visit Tampa. He was president of the Republican Left Party and had served as Minister of Education and Culture and as Minister of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce. When the war started in Spain in 1936, the government sent Marcelino Domingo as part of a delegation to garner support for the Republic in America. From his experience on these American tours he wrote two books: *España ante el Mundo* (1937), and *El Mundo ante España* (1938). The latter includes his recollections of his visit to Tampa in September 1937. During his stay in Tampa, Domingo felt overwhelmed by the outpouring of Republican support, not only among local Spaniards, but among Italians and Cubans as well. He compared this united front in the 1930s to Tampa's earlier outpouring of support for Cuban independence in the 1890s. After his last American tour, Marcelino Domingo returned to Spain in October 1937. He died in exile in France in March 1939. The following excerpt comes from his book *El mundo ante España* (Paris: La Technique du Livre, 1938), pages 390-98.]

From the moment of my arrival in the United States, the organizers of the “Tampa Committee to Aid the Spanish People” solicited my presence. They addressed themselves to me directly, as Spaniards, as Republicans, and some of them, as friends. They pressed the “North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy” to include Tampa in their propaganda tours. They requested time and time again the intervention of our embassy in Washington to see to it that I would travel to Tampa. When I left the United States to go to Mexico, there I received the same requests. Finally, when news reached Tampa of my planned trip to Havana, their appeals were made in terms that were impossible to ignore. Theirs was not the burdensome insistence of mere stubbornness, small-town pride, or whim; it was testimony to the magnificent will to serve and defend the Spanish Republic that existed in this American city. Here, on the coast near Cuba and Mexico, in the heart of Florida, populated by families of Italians, Cubans and Spaniards, together referred to as Latins, Tampa looks more like a Mediterranean city than a piece of Yankee territory.

On my way from Mexico to Cuba, I stopped in Tampa, to satisfy at last the desires that I shared with those who had requested my presence. Even before I could step off the train, I could sense the excitement and emotion of those who awaited me and who demonstrated their fervor for the

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Marcelino Domingo (left) greeted upon his arrival in Tampa by members of the Democratic Popular Committee to Aid Spain: Mariano Rodriguez (treasurer, center), Pedro Ramirez Moya (secretary) and Jose Martinez (president, right).

Photograph from the *Tampa Tribune*, September 4, 1937.

cause of Spain. “Long live the Spanish Republic!” they shouted when they saw me, with the same passion with which it could have been uttered on the home front or in the trenches. A sea of arms stretched out to embrace me and to warmly express their affection. The introductions took place on the platform, with the hastiness and confusion that reveal the fervor of the spirit. There were the presidents of the Spanish Clubs, of the labor unions, of the Italian and Cuban Clubs, reporters, and authorities.

A little old man, hat in hand and holding back tears, stepped forward. He was the Spanish Vice-Consul, the official representative of the far-away fatherland. I emphasize this both because of the ethical quality of the person and because there are still places where the Spanish official



The Labor Temple in Ybor City was the headquarters of the Democratic Popular Committee to Aid Spain.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

representation does not conduct itself in this way. In Saltillo, for example, one of the last Mexican cities I visited, the Spanish Vice-Consul, personally notified of my arrival, did not come to receive me (although I was received by the mayor, the presidents of the Spanish Clubs and hundreds of people). On a visit to an establishment, I was told who he was, but he remained seated, staring at me, without showing the courtesy extended by the others in attendance. Saltillo is not the only example of this. This shows that, after several months of war, the Republic has within itself, either ready to betray it or in open disaffection, many false servants collecting salaries. Those who serve, with honorary title, should not be exempt from the duty to serve with honor. With honor means with loyalty.

I stayed in Tampa three days. During that time I delivered speeches at the Labor Temple, the Masonic Lodge [the Loyal Knights of America], the Centro Asturiano, the Cuban Club, the House of Italy [Societa di Mutuo Soccorso Italia], the Italian Club, the Centro Español, the Centro Español Hospital, the Centro Asturiano Hospital, and a farewell speech again at the Labor Temple.

The speeches at the Labor Temple and the Masonic Lodge were delivered the night of my arrival. I thought that these visits would be just social calls. At the Labor Temple there were thousands of people; the traffic on the street had been stopped. There was an electrified, impassioned, inflamed mass of men and women. When I appeared on the platform, the acclamations to the Republic and to Spain were endless. I was moved by this unexpected demon-

stration, by the emotion stirred up in me by that magnificent popular response. Once again I understood the spiritual values that the name of Spain creates in the world and the need to nurture those spiritual values, so that territorial Spain may find in this immense spiritual Spain support, defense, and the best fruit of her martyrdom. From this birth of Spain, painful to the point of death, comes to life a spiritual Spain of dimensions and creative powers that Spain never had and never imagined. The strengthening of this new spiritual Spain and the realization of its extraordinary possibilities already constitute the transcendental historical responsibility of Spain. If Spain, having gained a military advantage on the battlefield, were to lose this spiritual Spain, which might be the greatest Empire any country has ever had, not only would she have won nothing, but she would have lost everything. Above all, she would have lost the opportunity for an effective influence in the political destiny of the world. At present, this spiritual Spain is the invisible battlefield where Fascism, by its own actions, has been stripped of moral authority, discredited, eradicated, vanquished. There, Fascism has already lost the war, and what is worse for Fascism, it has lost the future. The Spanish Republic, for its part, has earned the merits that entitle her to triumph in the war....That is a lot already.

But, the Spanish Republic must think, first, about sustaining this spiritual Spain which sustains her, and, second, about acting to ensure that Spain gains the future that Fascism has lost. If the Spanish Republic were to win the war with heroism at home and inspiration from abroad, with the irresistible thrust of the Spain of steel and the growing force of the spiritual Spain, but she were not to preserve or take care of the future, that loss would be a greater catastrophe for Spain than the collapse of her colonial empire. One can have colonies and lack moral influence. One can have moral influence without colonies. It is this moral influence, which no colonies can grant, that Spain can win right now. Never has Spain, so rightly preoccupied with the present, had to think more about the future. Never has Spain, so deeply rent by her internal drama, had to extend her eyes to the exterior so far beyond the horizon. Spain is today, again, a point of reference for the world. She could still be one tomorrow. It depends on her, and on her alone.

Why did the scene in Tampa arouse in me this obsessive and tormenting idea? I do not know. In Spain one thinks of the war. One must think of the war so much that one must not stop thinking about it. One thinks also of the revolution. What greater revolution than the war? What more victorious revolution than victory in the war? However, one must also think of this spiritual Spain, of such extraordinary expanse throughout the world, which offers war-torn Spain, for tomorrow, when we can build in peace, possibilities of international action as it never had before. To realize a great historical destiny is, for a people at war, the highest conquest that war can bring.

After the Labor Temple, where I delivered a speech about this spiritual Spain, I went, at midnight, to the big building of the Masonic Lodge. The street was again packed; children, women and men awaiting me formed an imposing crowd. I thought that the Lodge would be a small place, secluded, ceremonious and intimate. No. The crowd was huge there too. Girls dressed in white with a sash decorated with the three colors of the Spanish flag; boys dressed in blue with the Spanish flag in their hands; on the platform, united, the American and the Spanish flags. One of these girls, bursting into tears, sang to Spain; an old man, his voice trembling with emotion, remembered Spain; and of Spain I spoke. In the early morning hours, the *Himno de Riego* brought the event to a close, and that music that many times had seemed to lack feeling



Members of the Popular Democratic Committee to Aid Spain, in front of the Labor Temple, circa 1937.

Photograph courtesy of Aida Azpeitia.

and energy, brought to me the echoes and resonances of those hymns which beauty, history or hopes have made universal.

Of the remaining speeches, the main one was delivered at the Centro Asturiano Theater. All the rooms of this huge building were full of people, and there were loudspeakers in the street for the multitude who had not been able to secure a spot inside. There were other speeches, brief and specific, at the Centro Español and the Spanish hospitals. The most important was the one at the Centro Español, before thousands of people. But the three that I delivered with most intensity were at the Cuban Club and the two Italian Clubs. In the Cuban Club, before the apostolic image of [José] Martí, and in the Italian Clubs, where I was surrounded by Italians who greeted me in Italian and told me that they were not to blame for the conduct of the Italian state, and that there was an Italian majority who wished for the freedom of Spain to win, then, the freedom of Italy.

The Cuban Club brought me memories of the Cuban war for independence, where Martí found his death at the hands of Spaniards of the same ilk as those who launched the war against this Spain of 1936 which, like the Cuba of 1898, wants to be free. The Italian Clubs reminded me of the aggression of the dictatorships against the democracies. Cuba, Spain, Italy. Cuba and Spain were at war then. Spain and Italy are at war now. However, Spain, Italy and Cuba are united here, holding hands, uttering the same words. In the past, it was not the Spanish people, but the Spanish State, which attacked Cuba. The Spanish State, represented then by the same who now attack the Spanish people and who, if yesterday bled Cuba, tearing it from Spain, today bleed Spain, trying to strip it of the sovereignty she had won. The Italian State attacks the Spanish

Liberals as it has been attacking the Italian Liberals. It was not Spain that fought against Cuba, and it is not Italy that fights against Spain. In 1898, at the time of the war in Cuba, Spain confronted the same problem of independence against her state that Italy confronts today. In a Spanish Republican of today, a Cuban sees a fighter against the same things he had to fight yesterday, an Italian sees a fighter against what he will have to fight tomorrow. In these clubs of Tampa is where history, seemingly contradictory, achieves its most clear and profound interpretations.

But supporters of the Spanish Republic in Tampa do more than express their enthusiasm verbally. They demonstrate their solidarity in more effective ways. Through permanent and organized individual contributions they have already sent to the Spanish government \$80,000 and to the Spanish battlefields four ambulances.

“You must visit the cigar factories when they collect the money for Spain,” it was suggested to me. “Your visit will be appreciated, acclaimed and effective.”

So I did. Saturday afternoon I made the runs of the cigar factories. They are brick buildings – red and big. Some of them have the venerable authority of the oldest buildings of Tampa. The entrance is usually one-story high with an ample stone staircase. At the bottom of the stairs, or at the landing, were the people assigned to make the collections. With a stub-book in their hands, they handed over a ticket for the amount of the contribution made. From the factory came men and women, Latins and Americans, blacks and whites.

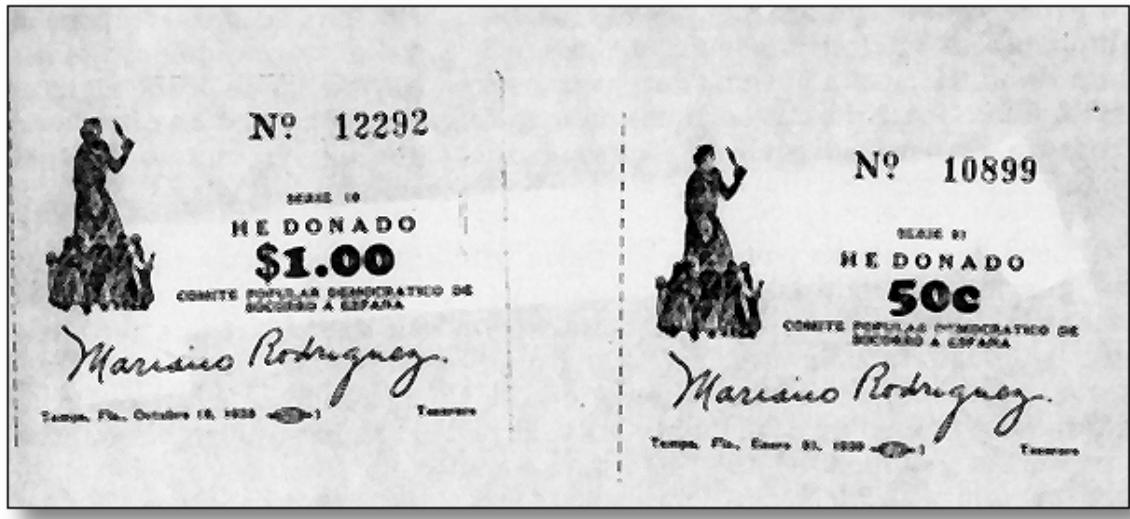
“For Spanish Democracy! For Spanish Democracy!” cried out the bearers of the stub-book. There was no worker who did not contribute something. But the donations were not given as one gives alms, or meets an obligation, or pays a tax, or bears a heavy tribute with resignation; they were given with the expression, demeanor, and tone of one who proudly fulfills a higher duty.

In one of those cigar factories I shook the hand of a humble worker who, from the beginning of the war, has donated five dollars every week. In another cigar factory, I was introduced to a woman who gives to Spain as much money as she used to save before.

“Since the war started,” she tells me “there are no movies, no theaters, no cafes, for the workers in Tampa. Nothing. The money that used to be spent on entertainment or put away in savings is now sent to Spain.”

In another cigar factory I was directed to an old colored man, who had served under [General Antonio] Maceo during the Cuban war for independence, and who has not let a week pass without contributing. When I pressed his hand between mine, he smiled. Under his black skin, his immaculately white teeth shone.

“Spain! Spain!” he groaned, and I don’t know whether he felt nostalgia, anguish or hope. And in a low voice, he uttered these profound words: “I too fought for Spain. I fought for Spain with Maceo and against [General Valeriano] Weyler. I fought for the Spain that now fights. Yesterday I gave her my blood and perhaps she thought I was her enemy; today I give her my money and she knows that I am her friend. I was as much a friend of Spain yesterday as I am today; as much



Tickets certifying the amount donated to Tampa's Democratic Popular Committee to Aid Spain.

Courtesy of the Luis Soto Fernández Collection, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Orense, Spain.

an enemy today as I was yesterday of the Spaniards who do not want to let Spain live. You are fighting for the same ideals and against the same enemies that we fought then..."

In front of the Martínez Ybor factory, the first one built in Tampa, they showed me the steps that spread over to the street like the seats of a small amphitheater.

"From these stairs," a Cuban who accompanies us tells me, "Martí spoke in Tampa about the independence of Cuba. Martí spoke, as you do now, of his fatherland. He spoke of Cuba's right to be free, as you speak of the right of Spain to be free. From these stairs he inspired, he taught, and he uncovered the truth. He persuaded. He created a spiritual Cuba, as you create a spiritual Spain. Martí did for Cuba what you are doing for Spain."

Indeed. Martí spoke from this platform. He spoke from these stairs and at the Ignacio Agramonte Club with its glorious past. It was here that his friends realized that Martí had lost weight, and grown pale and old. It was here that he delivered his famous speeches "With Cuba, for Cuba," and "The New Pines." It was here before the envious, the slanderers, the incredulous, the lukewarm, and those poisoned by base ambitions that he said: "For suffering Cuba, the first word. Cuba must be an altar where we offer our lives, not a pedestal to raise ourselves above her." An altar, not a pedestal. Is that holy invocation of Martí what created the civic and patriotic religion that today has united, with the same fervor, Italians, Cubans, and Spaniards and that, forty years after Martí's death, in this land of Tampa where far away Spain cannot be a pedestal, has made her an altar? Martí taught us to revere generously the peoples who give their lives for freedom. It is because of Martí's teachings and the luminous example of Spain that Tampa, in this vast spiritual Spain that finds its home in the whole world, has acquired the imposing majesty of a temple in which even the humblest stones have been made sublime by faith.