

# *The first day of school in Cuba*

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Today is the first day of school in Cuba. Here in Havana, near the studios of Havana Radio Cuba, a multitude of children could be seen, walking to their schools in their school uniforms, new book bags in hand, accompanied by their parents and grandparents. At the Mella Memorial, a few blocks from here, first year students of the University of Havana were addressed by leaders of the Federation of University Students. At the end of the ceremony inaugurating the academic year, the students walked en masse up the huge cement stairway to the center of the main campus of the University of Havana, where there are other activities for the day. The ceremony at the memorial of Juan Antonio Mella is an annual event, marking the beginning of each academic year.

Juan Antonio Mella founded the Federation of University Students in 1922, and he organized a national congress of students in 1923. University students played a leading role in the popular movements of the republic of 1902 to 1959. Marx had envisioned a revolution led by workers, but in the Cuban neocolonial republic, middle class university students had an interest in a revolution seeking the true sovereignty of the nation. There thus emerged in the urban areas in neocolonial Cuba an integrated movement of students and workers, seeking both the true sovereignty of the nation as well as the elimination of the exploitation and superexploitation of workers. Reflecting this integration of the student and workers movements, Mella was a leading figure in the establishment of the José Martí Popular University, which became a center for the exchange of ideas between students and workers. In addition, with Carlos Baliño López, a tobacco worker, Mella founded in 1925 the Communist Party of Cuba, the first Marxist-Leninist party in the nation.

Since the triumph of the revolution in 1959, the Federation of University Students, with membership of more than 90% of students, has played an active role in the construction of the socialist project. For example, during the past year, it was active in the national debates with respect to the new Cuban constitution, and its members were present as volunteer workers following a devastating tornado in a densely populated neighborhood in Havana.

Since 1959, similar mass organizations have been developed in the primary, middle, technical, and pre-university schools. These organizations also have extremely high levels of participation, and they play an important role in the education of children and youth into socialist values and responsible citizenship.

The student mass organizations at all levels elect their own leaders, who have an important voice in the shaping of the continually evolving socialist project of the nation.

We of the English-language department of Radio Havana Cuba salute the students of Cuba.

COMMENTARY / by Charles McKelvey

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