

THE PATH TAKEN BY THE PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION OF CUBA IN EXILE

Juan Luis Aguiar Muxella and Luis Ernesto Mejer Sarrá

In January 1959, a process began in Cuba wherein the country's government established a Communist economic system¹ that drastically changed the life of its people. The objective of a Communist economic regime, according to Karl Marx,² is to do away with private property on the basis that it represents its society. All the civil organizations of society fall under the absolute control of the government. Other characteristics of this regime are not analyzed in this article as they are beyond its scope.

In the pharmaceutical field, 2,260 pharmacies were expropriated by Cuba's communist government, along with 60 drug manufacturers,³ 262 Cuban laboratories, and 21 American, 1 French, 3 German, 1 Dutch, 1 Italian, 2 Spanish, 2 Canadian and 3 Swiss laboratories.⁴ This entire industrial and commercial conglomerate reflected the high level of the Cuban pharmaceutical industry in 1958. This was due to the economic level at the time, because since its inception in 1914, and up to 1958, the Cuban peso had the same value as the American dollar.⁵

The Pharmaceutical Association of Cuba, headed by its President Dr. Laureano Pequeño, who had been democratically elected by the members of the Association, was intervened by the Communist government on March 18, 1961. Dr. Pequeño died several months later, while his son, Laureano Pequeño Velo, a pharmaceutical student was serving a long prison term. He died shortly after becoming an exile in 2007.

EXILE AND PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION: PUERTO RICO AND MIAMI

Like many Cubans, pharmacists and their leadership did not want to live under the totalitarian regime in the island and they migrated to other countries, mainly the United States.⁶ The new exiles faced the sad reality that their university degrees were not accepted in foreign countries including the United States. Therefore, earning a living became their priority and plans for validating their degrees were postponed.

Since some Cuban pharmacists, due to the fact that they had left the island hurriedly while under surveil-

1. *History of Communism*, Richard Pipes, Random House Mondadori Editorial Group, 2002.

2. *Intellectual History of Humanity*, Peter Watson, Critique, Barcelona, 2005, p. 900.

3. "Past of Pharmacy in Cuba: Social Ideas, Expropriation and Deterioration of a Profession," Dr. Héctor Zayas-Bazán, Paper presented on the XXI Central American and Caribbean Congress of Pharmaceutical Science and the III National Pharmaceutical Congress, San José, Costa Rica, October 26–30, 1993.

4. Information obtained from Telephone Directory of Havana and the Provinces, January 1959, pp. 694–698 and 359–361.

5. *A Study on Cuba*. Cuban Economic Research Group, José Alvarez Díaz, principal author, University of Miami, 1963, p. 425.

6. *The Association in Exile*, Dr. Elina Ruiz Mesa, pamphlet published for the Centennial of the Pharmaceutical Association of Cuba, Miami, Florida, 2007, pp. 8–10.

lance, did not have any documentation establishing their credentials, in 1961 the Secretary of the Association, Attorney Salvador Juncadella, sent the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., a copy of the *Pharmaceutical Review* of 1958 which contained a listing of the 3,624 registered pharmacists in Cuba at that time. Also, Dr. Rosa Trina Lagomasino, former Dean of the School of Pharmacy at the University of Havana, would issue any pharmacist who requested it, an affidavit that would allow continuation of his or her studies. Nevertheless, very few exiles went back to school in Gainesville, Tallahassee or Puerto Rico.

A glimpse of hope to revalidate studies appeared on the horizon in 1962 and the Association, with a new name, The Cuban Pharmaceutical Association (in Exile), issued an associate card to identify its members while taking steps to achieve recognition and accreditation for its members in Puerto Rico and Miami through different roads.

In Puerto Rico, lengthy discussions between Cuban pharmacist Yoel Socarrás and Dr. Rodolfo Escabi, Dean of the School of Pharmacy of the University of Puerto Rico, were fruitful and course work completed in Cuba was validated through regular courses offered at night so students could work during the day. After three years of studies (a requirement of the school), 60 Cuban pharmacists graduated for a second time, now with the title of Bachelor of Pharmacy issued by the University of Puerto Rico. These graduates went on to pass their validation exams in Puerto Rico in 1974.

In Miami, Cuban pharmacists took similar steps until April 1974 when the Association, under President Dr. Erasmo Penichet, was invited to the Conference of University Professionals presided by Dr. Cristobal González Mayo. The dream of being able to practice in the State of Florida apparently became a reality when State Act 3732 was passed allowing validation, provided professionals met certain requirements. However, in mid-1976, Representative James Redman sponsored Act 295, voiding the aforementioned

law. This issue was debated in the State Senate and, thanks to Senator Pat Thomas (D), a special law was approved granting Cubans the right to validate their credentials pending additional studies.

A special one-year course was offered at Loyola School, located on Coral Way and 104th Avenue in Miami. It was offered from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Mr. Max Lemberg, Assistant to the Dean of the School of Pharmacy at the University of Florida in Gainesville, was in charge of developing the course which included video conferences. Three hundred exiled pharmacists graduated with a degree as licensed pharmacists, and they passed the validation exam in Florida in 1977.

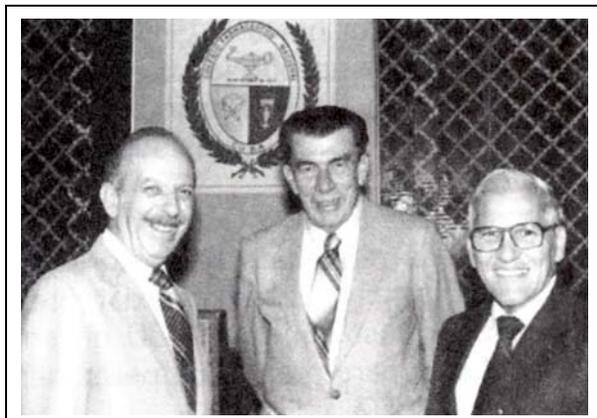
CONTINUING EDUCATION

The rapid advances of human knowledge during the Twentieth Century⁷ has resulted in legislation from the 1970s, whereby all U.S. professionals must take continuing education classes after graduation in order to practice their profession. The Board of each profession establishes its rule for each state, and universities, professional associations and educational institutions that specialize in these matters may offer these courses. Due to the efforts, in great part, of Dr. Fernando Soto, The Cuban Pharmaceutical Association (in Exile) took a step forward and currently offers courses that meet all the requirements for continuing education as per the Pharmaceutical Board of the State of Florida through four 4–hours seminars during the year.

Dr. Soto, from the New York Chapter of The Cuban Pharmaceutical Association (in Exile) was highly instrumental in achieving the professional validations in Miami, where he relocated and opened a pharmacy. He was elected President of the Association in the 1968 elections, succeeding Dr. Juan Domínguez Mousset who had also been president of the Association in Cuba. Figure 1 is a photo of Dr. Fernando Soto accompanied by Dr. Eduardo Sabatés, the current President of the Association, and Dr. Juan Domínguez Mousset.

7. *Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*, Peter Watson, Critique, Barcelona 2002.

Figure 1. Dr. Fernando Soto accompanied by Dr. Eduardo Sabatés, President the Cuban Pharmaceutical Association (in Exile), and Dr. Juan Domínguez Mousset



PAN-AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL CONGRESS AND THE USURPATION OF OUR REPRESENTATION

Cuba had the privilege of being the host in 1948 of the First Pan-American Pharmaceutical Congress,⁸ where the Pharmaceutical Charter of Havana was approved, setting out the concepts that governed the practice of university-graduate pharmacists in Latin America. After going into exile, the Association continued to represent Cuba in Pan-American Congresses. Figure 2 shows the delegation of the Cuban Pharmaceutical Association (in Exile) at the XIII Pan-American Congress of Pharmacy and Biochemistry celebrated in the Dominican Republic, November 1988.

As stipulated in the Pharmaceutical Pan-American Resolution of Panama of November 28, 1972, the General Assembly established, in clear and no uncertain terms, that The Cuban Pharmaceutical Associa-

Figure 2. Delegation of the Cuban Pharmaceutical Association (in Exile) at the XIII Pan-American Congress of Pharmacy and Biochemistry



tion (in Exile) was the official Cuban representative before the Pan-American Pharmaceutical Federation. This representation lasted until 1996,⁹ when the Government of Cuba, under the name of Cuban Society of Pharmaceutical Science, usurped our representation which had existed freely for 35 years.

It must be pointed out that Dr. Fernando Soto's participation in the Pan-American Pharmaceutical Congresses, before the usurpation, was so outstanding that in the Congress celebrated in Brazil he was to receive an award. Unfortunately he passed away prior to the ceremony and his award was received by Dr. Eduardo Sabatés, the Vice President at the time, and delivered to his widow in Miami.¹⁰

CENTENNIAL OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CUBAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION

The year of 2007 marked the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Cuban Pharmaceutical Association. It was celebrated with a luncheon at the Big Five Club in Miami. Homage was paid to all who had obtained Sarrá Awards at the School of Pharma-

8. *Centennial of the National Pharmaceutical Association of Cuba*, Dr. Héctor Zayas-Bazán, pamphlet published by The Cuban Pharmaceutical Association in Exile, Miami, Florida, 2007, pp. 4–7.

9. Letter of Eduardo Sabatés, President of the Cuban Pharmaceutical Association in Exile, to Mr. Efrén Fernández, Secretary of the Central American and Caribbean Federation of Pharmaceutical Science, protesting the inclusion of Communist Cuba in said Federation, Miami, Florida, 1996.

10. The importance of Dr. Soto's work in his field was such that the City of Miami named a street after him. This is an honor that in the United States is reserved for outstanding citizens, being even more meritorious for Dr. Soto since he was not born in the United States.

cy of the University of Havana, and to the descendants of the Sarrá family, including grandchildren and great grandchildren.¹¹ The Sarrá Award was presented to the top three students in a subject each year. It consisted of a diploma and gold, silver and bronze medals for the first, second and third prize winners plus a cash award. The prizes were awarded during a solemn ceremony held on February 19th, Pharmacist's Day, at the headquarters of the Cuban Pharmaceutical Association, attended by the directors of the school, subject chairmen who awarded the prizes, and a representative of Dr. Ernesto Sarrá. Figures 3 and 4, respectively, depict the "Premio Sarrá" medals, as well as the recipients of the awards in 1956.

Figure 3. The "Premio Sarrá" Medals



Figure 4. 1956 Recipients of "Premio Sarrá" Medals



The Sarrá family has been very close to both, the Pharmaceutical Association and members of the Cuban pharmaceutical profession. The immigrants from Catalonia opened La Reunión Pharmacy in La Habana in 1853. (Figure 5 is a photograph of Drogería Sarrá *circa* 1920.) In 1880, José Sarrá Valldejuli requested authorization from the Honorable Governor of Spain to establish in Cuba the first pharmaceutical association, while being interim president of said association. In 1907, his son, Ernesto Sarrá Hernández, became a member-at-large of the founding board of National Pharmaceutical Association. In 1930, he donated a three-story building at 107 Malecón (the symbolic Havana oceanfront boulevard) to serve as headquarters of the National Pharmaceutical Association of Cuba. He also established the Sarrá Awards in the School of Pharmacy at the University of Havana to encourage professional excellence and awarded a one-year scholarship to study abroad to the student with the highest average at graduation, including a cash allowance. In 1955 he established a five-year scholarship for a low income student at the Catholic University of Santo Tomás de Villanueva to study pharmacy.

CUBAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION (IN EXILE)

The Cuban Pharmaceutical Association (in Exile), successor of the Pharmaceutical Association of Cuba, presided by Dr. Eduardo Sabatés, sponsors two social activities each year. One to commemorate February 19th, instituted in Cuba as Pharmacist's Day, with a mass in honor of those who have died the previous year. The other, a luncheon and dance on October 10th, in remembrance of the Association's founding. During this ceremony, diplomas are awarded to all members who are 50 or 60-year graduates.

The Pharmaceutical Association of Cuba functioned in Cuba for 53 years. Interestingly, in October 2013 the Association in exile will reach 53 years of existence in the United States, always vigilant over the health of its citizenry and the welfare of its members.

11. *Drogería Sarrá: A Brief History*, Luis Ernesto Mejer-Sarrá. Pamphlet published to mark its 150th Anniversary, Miami, 2003.

Figure 5. Drogería Sarrá circa 1920



We hope that the Directors of the Cuban Pharmaceutical Association (in Exile) will continue to overcome any obstacles that come in its way. When history analyzes the times we live in, we are sure the

Cuban nation will be most proud of its exiled pharmacists and the directors of its professional association.