

*Amitai Etzioni*\* | INTERVENTION FOR  
PROGRESS IN THE DOMINICAN  
REPUBLIC

There is a better way to combat communism in Latin America than by sending in the Marines.<sup>1</sup> It is to eliminate the economic and social conditions that breed communism.

But because one of the strongest attempts to put this theory into practice was conducted by the United States in the Dominican Republic, recent events there raise two major questions about American foreign policy: Why did the attempt fail, and what does the failure portend for similar attempts elsewhere in Latin America?

The Dominican Republic was chosen by the Kennedy Administration as a model for this solution to communism in Latin America, but it failed with the fall of the Juan Bosch government in September 1963.

The Dominican Republic was chosen for several reasons. It is

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<sup>1</sup> In a previous volume in this series, Abraham F. Lowenthal published a study of "Foreign Aid as a Political Instrument, the Case of the Dominican Republic," in John D. Montgomery and Arthur Smithies (eds.), *Public Policy*, vol. XIV (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Graduate School of Public Administration, 1966), pp. 141-160. The present study of the same case was completed before the publication of Lowenthal's. It was published in French in *Civilizations*; part of it appeared in the *Washington Post*. This study provides an alternative interpretation of the same basic data on which Lowenthal reported. The main difference is that Lowenthal views the Dominican experiment as basically a successful application of foreign aid as a political instrument, whereas this author views it as basically a misapplication. The details of the arguments are found in the two articles. The key differences seem to lie in evaluation of the United States' focus on preparing the elections and relative inattention to the army. This author suggests that too much effort was invested in a formal institutional change (the elections) and too little in a hard political one (weakening the Trujillo army). Lowenthal seems to support the United States' emphasis on elections (in the middle period) and does not discuss the role of the army. I should add that Lowenthal's study of the case is much more extensive than mine. Mine is part of a larger study of societal engineering, *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes* (New York: Free Press, 1968).

on the doorstep of Castro's Cuba, where a developing, democratic Santo Domingo could demonstrate by contrast the blessings awaiting those who choose the American way of modernization. In addition, it was believed the United States could provide all the means necessary for development without undue strain because the Dominican Republic is a small country with a population of 3.5 million. Finally, what country could better symbolize the renewed American commitment to progress than one where a tyrant reigned for a generation?

### *Money and Advice*

The most important effort made to support democratic progress was through a wide range of economic, administrative, and social reforms that could have helped the young democratic government of Bosch to obtain a wide base.

First of all the United States sent money. In February 1962, almost a year before Bosch won the Dominican Republic's first free election since 1924, this country extended to Santo Domingo a \$25 million credit under the Alliance for Progress. This was followed with an outright grant of \$22¾ million approved in November 1962.

The kind of unusual, high-priority, high-pressure help extended to Bosch is well illustrated by the following statement by John Bartlow Martin, United States Ambassador to the Dominican Republic.

In Washington, I told all this to the Department, the Congress, the press, and the President. Sometimes in meetings, sometimes alone, sometimes in their offices and sometimes at lunch or dinner. I talked with George Ball, William Crockett, Ed Martin, Bob Manning, Arturo Morales Carrión, Allen Robbins, John Crimmins, Kennedy Crockett, Bill Sowash in the Department; with Dave Bell and Ted Moscoso and others in AID; with Ralph Dungan and Arthur Schlesinger in the White House; with Sargent Shriver and Dick Goodwin and others in the Peace Corps; with several CIA men; with Senator Humphrey and Congressmen Selden, Fascell, and Brademas; with Justice Douglas; with Edgar

Kaiser and Lloyd Cutler; with Ambassador del Rosario. Newell Williams and Al Mayne attended the economic and AID meetings. I went over to the Pentagon, trying to get Bosch's patrol boats; went to the CIA and asked for help; went to lunch with Kaiser's lawyer; saw several businessmen; had lunch with Justice Douglas to discuss moving the educational television idea faster; had dinner with fifteen or twenty leading bureau chiefs, columnists, and editors from the newspapers, magazines, and wire services; asked Abram Chayes, the Department's legal adviser, to work out an acceptable method of land expropriation; talked to Bob Kennedy, the Attorney General, about the same question and about deportations and setting up an anti-subversive force for Bosch and one for me . . . .

Next to capital, the United States believes that what a country needs most is advice. Hence, scores of American experts rushed to the aid of the new government. In addition to high-level advisers on housing, farming, and fiscal policy, there were American specialists in poultry administration and road building. Alliance advisers helped set up a National Planning Board, a National Housing Bank, and a reforestation project. The Peace Corps organized 4-H Clubs, drilled wells, and taught English.<sup>2</sup>

This economic and technical assistance was to be used in accordance with a policy of social reform that this country had urged upon Bosch. The sociopolitical theory was that communism thrives on misery, oppression, and ignorance. Hence, the best antidote to communism is to encourage governments to be responsive to the needs of the people, and democratic elections are the best means.

### *Reforms Never Came*

Bosch favored this line. Whereas his opponent in the 1963 election stressed "de-Trujillonization," Bosch built his campaign around helping the poor against the rich, especially through agrarian reform. He gained his largest majorities in the poor sections.

<sup>2</sup> For background, see the first study in Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, *United States-Latin America Compilation of Studies* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960).

ing approach required uprooting the forces that might have unseated him before they had a chance to do so. Bosch's downfall was caused, more than anything else, by the fact that he left the military forces largely intact and tried to win the cooperation of the social-economic groups whose interests were threatened by his planned reforms. One of Bosch's major problems was that he was caught between two forces. To retain the support of the status-quo groups and thus stay in power, he needed to slow down reforms; if he pushed reforms too vigorously, those groups would feel estranged and would endanger democratic government. But by slowing down reforms, Bosch faced the danger of being unable to build the popular support that a democratic government requires. Rather than falling prey to either danger, Bosch fell prey to both.<sup>4</sup>

First, he alienated the upper caste, a highly integrated social strata of "good families" who trace their ancestors to the Spaniards. These powerful and affluent families—the landlords and businessmen—look down on the "second-class" (mixed-blood) and "third-class" citizens, who are disparagingly referred to as "niggers." The upper caste had supported Trujillo and benefited from his rule. Bosch built his party, the Dominican Revolutionary party, on the second and third groups.<sup>5</sup> Accustomed to being in power, the upper caste was alienated, but neither they nor their traditional ally, the army, was rendered harmless.

The failure to disband the armed forces and set up a new militia with a higher ratio of members and especially of officers of the second and third groups was vital. To have done so was by no means impossible in the early days, with United States support, and before the enthusiasm following liberation from the tyrant had waned. Bosch did cut back the military's budget gradually, but although these cuts angered the armed forces, they did not undermine its power. Moreover, the police force mushroomed, growing from 6,000 to 16,000, in the period between the assassination of Trujillo and Bosch's downfall.<sup>6</sup> An unknown number of former army men became police officers, and an antidemocratic

<sup>4</sup> Victor Alba, "Why Bosch Fell," *New Republic*, October 12, 1963, pp. 12-13.

<sup>5</sup> For Bosch's own view of the sociology of the Dominican Republic and his movement, see Juan Bosch, *The Unfinished Experiment: Democracy in the Dominican Republic* (New York: Praeger, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> "New Man for the Dominicans," *New Republic*, March 2, 1963, p. 8.

mentality prevailed in the police. When the revolt came, following Bosch's attempt to fire Colonel Wessin y Wessin, it was carried out jointly by all the armed services and the police force, directed by Bosch's own Secretary of Defense, General Victor Vinas Roman.

It was not accidental that Bosch followed a win-them-over rather than a break-or-check-them approach; it was very much the line of his American advisers. Actually, however, Washington never felt completely comfortable with Bosch's left-of-center approach. He talked about eventual confiscation of foreign property; his minister of education used some textbooks printed in Castro's Cuba; Bosch criticized publicly the Alliance for Progress, and threatened to cancel a big contract the provisional government had hurriedly signed with Standard Oil of New Jersey.

Similarly, the American primary preoccupation with the legal-institutional rather than the sociopolitical-economic side of democracy was another factor that led astray this attempt at reform. The first 18 months after the assassination of Trujillo—with half of the country's labor force unemployed, and economic activity paralyzed—were spent in preparation for elections.<sup>7</sup>

The United States put strong pressure on the temporary Council of State, which held the reins in the interval, to set up election booths, arrange voter registration, and print ballots, reflecting our almost mystical belief in the blessing that orderly elections would confer on this backward society.<sup>8</sup> Had the United States used the same pressure to bring about social reforms at this stage, had we allowed Bosch (or even some more fundamental reformers) to work at laying the social bases of democracy, the constitution, which Bosch spent so much time rewriting, might have had stronger foundations.

### *Political Neophyte*

In any event, the upper caste and the military might have waited longer and the reforms might have had a better chance to take

<sup>7</sup> See Neale C. Ronning, *Law and Politics in Inter-American Diplomacy* (New York: John Wiley, 1963).

<sup>8</sup> Jerome Slater, "The US, the OAS, and the Dominican Republic," *International Organization*, XVIII (Spring 1964), pp. 268-291.

root if Bosch had not played into his enemies' hands. Bosch was hardly an experienced political leader. He had spent most of his adult life in voluntary exile, reading, writing, and reflecting. Upon gaining office, he temporized, like many an intellectual-turned-politician.<sup>9</sup> The election was the high point of his short political career. From then on, he quickly lost momentum, talking more about land reform than carrying it out, planning long-run development amidst mass unemployment. In fact, moreover, his talks and plans—and clauses on confiscation which he wrote into the constitution—sufficed to bring the roof down with next to no protest from the workers or peasants, precisely because he had lost much of his popularity among them through his temporizing, particularly on reform. Finally, Bosch was faced with vitriolic attacks from both flanks. The extreme left accused him of being the “lackey of the American imperialists” and the right branded him a communist—citing his refusal to outlaw three small and ineffectual communist groups, allowing the return of communists from exile and allowing articles in the constitution prejudicial to ownership of any large amount of private land.<sup>10</sup>

In the weeks that preceded Bosch's overthrow, meetings of “Christian Reaffirmation” were held in towns and villages throughout the Republic in which Bosch's alleged communist leanings were exposed. In the same meetings, the military, whose reputation had suffered from revelations following the assassination of Trujillo, was re-established as the defender of the faith and the “patria.”

No one test case decides any issue. If the story of other experimental democracies in recent years had been different, the fall of constitutional government in the Dominican Republic might have had a smaller impact on the United States' policy of support for democratic progress. But similar developments have taken place in other republics in the Western Hemisphere, as well as in Asia and Africa. It should be apparent, too, that whatever was

<sup>9</sup> The view of Bosch as an inexperienced politician is widely held. See, for instance, John Bartlow Martin, *Overtaken by Events* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), p. 716 and *passim*. The fact that Bosch has some leadership qualities, especially of a revolutionary movement, does not contradict but reinforces the statement.

<sup>10</sup> Szulc, *loc. cit.*

wrong with Bosch, there was much more wrong with a policy that expected that even gradual reforms could take root without deeper plowing, a steadier hand to the plow, and fewer changes of direction in the middle of the furrow.