



As Well as could be expected

By Norman Gall

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The uprising of April 1965 and its suppression by American military intervention are still the memories that obsess this disaster-weary nation. Santo Domingo is still divided into two enemy camps: the slums of the former rebel zone, where new peasant migrants have increased the population to nearly four times its 1950 level; and the quiet residential neighbourhoods surrounding the American embassy where the upper and middle classes live uneasily within a stone's throw of the chaos and despair of the poor.

Seven different governments have ruled since Raguél Trujillo was gunned down in 1961. (There were nearly twice that many if you count the regimes that lasted less than a week or established control over only part of the republic.) In this period the American mission here has grown from a small consulate to the next largest American embassy in Latin America after Brazil; the 900 employees are double the number at the time of the 1965 revolution. Over the past five years more than \$320 million in American aid funds has been spent, most of it on political and economic rescue operations. Long-range development schemes have been continually interrupted by political disorders. The American ambassador runs what amounts to a government-in-miniature with scores of American advisers coaching the armed services and taking part in the affairs of nearly all key government agencies.

President Joaquín Balaguer, who celebrated his first anniversary in power on July 1st, has shown remarkable political skill in using this vast American support. He has won wide respect for trimming costs in the government sugar mills so that sugar production, the country's principal dollar earner, is profitable for the first time in years. Moreover, President Balaguer and his principal Dominican advisers (most of whom were senior officials under Trujillo) have warmed the hearts of their American advisers by insisting that no more aid should be given as budgetary support; they have asked instead for plenty of capital funds as quickly as possible.

President Balaguer has also halted the terrorism that over the past two years has resulted in the death, disappearance or imprisonment of many of those who took the "constitutionalist" or "rebel" side in the 1965 uprising. Last spring Sr. Casimiro Castro of the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD), the principal opposition party, was critically injured when a fire-bomb exploded in his car. In a televised speech, President Balaguer suggested that Sr. Castro was carrying the bomb in order to plant it somewhere himself. When the entire PRD group boycotted congress in protest, President Balaguer promised to take steps to end the terrorism at once. Since then, Santo Domingo has been quieter than at any time for the past four years.

A devout and ascetic Roman Catholic who has leaned heavily on the "communist" issue, President Balaguer has proved to be surprisingly shrewd and tough in handling the opposition. He has effectively split the "constitutionalist" movement, especially the PRD, by appointing several of its leaders to government or diplomatic posts. He has pressed his advantage home by changing the tax laws so that the revenues of the PRD-controlled municipality of Santo Domingo have been halved. For three months the city has been unable to pay its 4,000 employees—who compose most of the party's rank and file.

Hunger and unemployment are as serious in Santo Domingo as in any Latin American city. Roughly half the adult males in the capital are out of work with the proportion reaching 90 per cent in some of the poorer *barrios* because a high premium is placed on government jobs, politics is more a do-or-die affair here than in most places. This is why Santo Domingo's slum-dwellers, who defeated crack Dominican tank and infantry units two years ago, are now talking about a renewal of the 1965 revolution.

Unemployment is also the driving force behind the formation of the Balaguer Veteran's Front, a ragged force claiming 10,000 adherents under the leadership of an old Trujilista general. The front has launched a campaign of "voluntary" street cleaning in the hope of profiting should the PRD lose control of the city at the municipal elections next June.

If President Balaguer's manoeuvres against the PRD do not backfire into a renewal of political violence, he may be able to claim to have given his people their first period of constructive calm since Trujillo's death. The 70-man American Military mission has been taking great pains to dampen any sign of conspiracy among the rightist generals and colonels. But the earlier this month the president dismissed the commanders of the air force and police and once again there were rumours of right-wing plotting. The hard-line right is campaigning vociferously for the return of its leader, General Elias Wessin, who was deported forcibly by American troops in late 1965 and later was named military adviser to the Dominican delegation to the United Nations, with residence in Miami. The pro-Wessin campaign has tried to broaden its appeal by calling also for the return of the "constitutionalist" leader, Colonel Francisco Caamaño Deñó, who is still in exile as military attaché in London. It is just possible that the right and the left will be driven together by the continuing unemployment. But, given some luck, President Balaguer has a better chance than any recent Dominican leader to plan and to build.

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