



The Strange Dominican Election

By Norman Gall

The New Leader, June 20, 1966

SALCEDO

The June 1 Dominican elections, spectacularly reversing Juan Bosch's landslide victory of 1962 with a similar landslide for Joaquin Balaguer, have been greeted with unstinting praise from near and far. An observer's mission from the Organization of American States (OAS) declared itself "unanimous in affirming the perfect correctness of the authorities' procedure," and said the polling took place in "perfect order and full freedom." The American Committee for Free Elections in the Dominican Republic, headed by Norman Thomas and Bayard Rustin and generally favorable to Bosch, has testified to the fairness of the voting. Provisional President Hector Garcia Godoy — formerly Bosch's Foreign Secretary, later Vice-President of Balaguer's Partido Reformista — called it "an example for all the Americas." President Johnson apparently concurring, wired him congratulations for "bringing the Dominican people from the turbulence of a civil war to the peace of free elections."

And, indeed, the actual balloting in the principal towns was very orderly and quiet. Those who rushed to rejoice in the event, however, would have been wise to wait for the counting — both of the votes and of irregularities now coming to light. For the fact is that the electoral procedures of at least the all-important military authorities — claimed to be "perfectly correct... free.. fair," etc.—included: widespread commandeering and switching of ballot boxes; conniving at mass forgery of identification cards; seizing and beating up a Boschist Congressional candidate; murdering Boschist supporters and preventing investigation or punishment of the offenders; importing, in defiance of Dominican law, Cuban experts in vote fraud formerly high in Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship; general intimidation of the peasantry; and a series of mendacious campaign practices, among them the distribution from Air Force planes of spliced photos showing Bosch and Fidel Castro embracing.

The final results — their erratic and delayed release, curious discrepancies with the 1962 figures, and the huge increase in the over-all vote — raise further questions. Not, it should be stressed, that many observers, including myself, thought it impossible for Balaguer to win an honest contest. On the contrary, conditions in the Dominican Republic were quite unfavorable for Bosch and his Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD). The former President's understandable fear of leaving his house — after the killing of over 200 of his supporters since September — forced the substitution of added radio broadcasts for the effective countryside campaigning of 1962. In addition, the absence of two leading lieutenants also hurt: Sacha Volman, a Rumanian Socialist refugee from Nazi and Communist persecution, left Bosch after becoming a principal target of the bogus "anti-Communist" crusade of the extreme Right that drove Bosch from power in 1963; and Angel Miolán, longtime PRD Secretary-General, broke with Bosch as a result of quarrels during and after their seven months in power.

Nor was the general political climate the same as in 1962. The shrewd campaign then had lured into the Bosch camp many thousands of Trujillo supporters — and some key financial

contributors — because they were frightened by the furious anti-Trujillista campaign of Bosch's leading opponent, Viriato Fiallo of the *Union Civica Nacional* (UCN). Dominated by the white-skinned oligarchy that was subdued or shoved aside by Trujillo, the UCN since the dictator's death has coveted Trujillo's \$800 million economic empire (now considerably depreciated after four years of nationalization). In the 1962 campaign, therefore, Bosch exploited not only the conflict of the very rich against the very poor, but also the resentment of many members of the lower-middle class, which had advanced under Trujillo, against the revanchism and pathetic snobbery of many of the little Republic's "first families."

This year the Trujillistas had their own candidate in Balaguer, like Bosch a son of the provincial lower-middle class. Balaguer had served as President during the tense six-month interregnum from the dictator's May 1961 assassination to the Trujillo clan's evacuation, and during this period had pleased the poor by lowering the prices of rice and cooking oil.

Changes in the military further contributed to the unfavorable conditions for Bosch. Of the officers ordered to leave the country by Garcia Godoy following the December 19 attack by Air Force tanks and troops on a Constitutionalist memorial gathering in Santiago, only the Boschists complied fully. Most of the others stayed, contributing to the atmosphere of lawlessness and intimidation that so hampered the Bosch and PRD campaign.

Still, despite all the circumstances favoring Balaguer, there is strong reason to doubt the validity of his apparent mandate. To begin with, importation of pro-Batista Cubans — with the government's connivance — contrasted unhappily with the rejection of OAS electoral aid, accepted in 1962. Angel M. Liz, who was appointed president of the Dominican National Electoral Board by Reid Cabral shortly after the 1963 coup, explained the exclusion of the OAS teams by citing his opposition to foreign interference.

Yet the Board did not object to the presence of Santiago Rey, Minister of Government in the Batista dictatorship and known in Cuban political circles as a master of electoral manipulation. Arriving as foreign editor of the Spanish-language newspaper *El Tiempo* of New York — run by former Trujillo press agent Stanley Ross — Rey spent almost two months at the Hotel Embajador before being deported by Dominican immigration officials for "intervening in political affairs." Before Rey could be put aboard a plane, though, he was whisked away by a group of Balaguer supporters, led by vice-presidential candidate Francisco Augusto Lora, who presented a Presidential order from Garcia Godoy for Rey's return to the capital.

The Cuban influx, in fact, was so large and systematic that it suggested overall planning. The Immigration director revealed he had a list of 310 Cubans who entered the country without the required visa. Many, he said, were picked up at the airport by vehicles from the San Isidro Air Force Base, then swept away without passing through customs. And a few days before the voting, a Dominican military plane landed at San Isidro to discharge a group of Spanish-speaking civilians.

Other Cuban visitors—some of them reportedly on the CIA payroll — included the commander of a CIA-financed training base for Cuban exiles in Nicaragua; Miguel Suarez Fernandez, Senator from Santa Clara in the Batista period and expert in electoral problems; Angel Yergo, one of Batista's many hired journalists; and Fati García, former manager of the Cuban Electricity Company. Even the electronic computers used in the head-quarters of the National Electoral Board were operated by Cuban exile employees of IBM. Later, all of this, plus Balaguer's winning the same 60 per cent majority Bosch won in 1962, reminded one of Batista's fraudulent 1940 election victory over Ramon Grau San Martin — which was marked by much military intimidation of voters in peasant areas, the use of phantom polling places to produce huge Batista majorities, substitution of ballot boxes after the polls closed, and multiple voting through mass forgery of voters' identification cards.

Suspicious, too, was the manner in which the Dominican election results were disclosed. Although computers were used this time, the counting of ballots and announcing of returns proceeded much more slowly than in 1962, when the counting was done by hand. In Bosch's 1962 landslide, all the 1,055,000 ballots were counted and the results known the day after the vote; this year they were still being counted and the results were being revised five days after the election.

In a radio speech on May 16, Balaguer had made the astounding declaration: "If approximately 1.5 million voters do not participate in the elections, the results cannot be admitted as satisfactory." The 1.5 million vote would have represented an incredible increase of nearly one-half over the large 1962 turnout after a 14-month campaign. Yet as the surprise Balaguer landslide was slowly announced, it seemed that the 1.5 million figure might actually be reached. With tension mounting throughout the country over the result, Balaguer's margin of victory diminished and the increase in voters finally turned out to be around 25 per cent. A total of 1,321,693 votes was officially recorded.

The Electoral Board eked out the results piecemeal, polling place by polling place and province by province, in a two-day television marathon. The first national results were not available until June 4. According to these figures, Balaguer had annihilated Bosch's popularity in areas where the P1W had won overwhelmingly four years ago. For example, in San Cristobal, Trujillo's birthplace, where Bosch had registered a thumping 7-1 majority in 1962, Balaguer won by a decisive 3-2 margin — though this province, a PRD stronghold, contains the giant Haina sugar mill whose payroll was padded in 1963 with Bosch followers. The day after the election several of the sugar complex's ballot boxes were unaccounted for, its manager was arrested, and a machine gun was set up by the Army in the central office building.

Balaguer also won in Bosch's birthplace, La Vega, where in 1962 the PRD and the Social Christians (PRSC) — the two parties backing Bosch this year — won 65 per cent of the vote. Balaguer took 66 per cent of the vote, with the Social Christians — the country's third party — getting only 10 per cent of their 1962 total. In El Seibo, taken 3-1 by Bosch four years ago, Balaguer triumphed by 2-1. Most striking was the shift in Dajabon, near the Haitian frontier, where in 1936 Trujillo's troops slew between 10,000 and 30,000 Haitian squatters according to varying estimates. There, a 2-1 Bosch majority of 1962 was converted into a 4-1 endorsement of Trujillo's former President and Foreign Minister.

No less dramatic perhaps, when broken down, is the overall increase in the vote. In Santo Domingo, where Balaguer cut Bosch's 80 per cent avalanche of 1962 to a more modest 63 per cent, voting increased by 87 per cent. The total vote of the interior provinces alone exceeded the entire national balloting for 1962. Balaguer's winning margin of 237,000 votes corresponded almost exactly to the huge increase of officially-reported voting. The increase is especially remarkable, since voting is mandatory in the Dominican Republic and conditions were much less turbulent in 1962.

On the afternoon following the election, sullen crowds of slum dwellers and other PRD and Social Christian militants massed around the headquarters of both parties in Santo Domingo. They chanted political slogans, blocked traffic and brushed tensely against jeeps armed with automatic weapons, that began patrolling the slums and downtown area controlled last year by rebel forces. With the capital flooded by reports of fraud and repression in the interior, two Canadian reporters and I decided to make a spot check of some towns of the Cibao valley, though we clearly risked missing a major outbreak of violence in the capital. Unfortunately, no one else among the dozens of newspapermen at the Hotel Embajador attempted such a check.

The towns we visited seemed under martial law. There was no sign of the celebrations a foreigner would expect after a leading politician had received an overwhelming popular mandate in a critical election. Passing through La Vega after midnight, two nights after the voting, we found that the Army had set up sandbagged strongpoints in the streets, guarded

by barbed wire and 50 caliber machine guns. There were sentries inside and outside the cemetery guarding against desecration of graves where discarded Bosch votes had been found and were reportedly buried.

"The Army is in the streets because they know the people will not easily accept this," said a grayhaired physician who is a member of the Social Christian splinter faction that opposed Bosch's candidacy. "We saw 14-year-old girls voting with fake identity cards. The soldiers were officially confined to their barracks after Bosch threatened to withdraw from the campaign if the military intimidation didn't stop, but in the final weeks soldiers circulated around the countryside in civilian dress to campaign for Balaguer. On election day the soldiers wore civilian dress and got in line to vote, though the law prohibits military personnel from voting. The voter's finger is dipped in indelible red ink to prevent people from voting several times, but while the ink they used could not be washed away with soap and water, it came off easily with clorox, beer or cucumber juice."

In Moca, most PRD and Social Christian leaders were being sought by the police and had fled. In the city of Puerto Plata there was a power failure election night as the ballots were being counted, though a new electricity plant had recently begun operation. In Santiago three ballot boxes were seized by the Army and did not reappear for three days.

The conflicts and pressures of the campaign were virulently evident in Salcedo. A small municipality set among the populous savannahs and banana plantations of the northern region of the Cibao, this had been one of the major centers of resistance to the Trujillo tyranny. It was here that the three Mirabal sisters, members of the Castroite 14th of June Movement, were bludgeoned to death on an isolated stretch of road under the supervision of a man in a red Mercedes-Benz wearing a cowboy hat. The man was later identified as Antonio Imbert, then Governor of neighboring Puerto Plata Province, later the lone surviving assassin of Trujillo, and after the 1965 revolt the U.S.-backed champion against "Communism" — though over the previous three years he had been blandishing the extreme Left with arms and money. In the final years of the Trujillo Era, Salcedo became a focus of activity of what is now the 14th of June Movement. In the 1962 elections, Bosch won 13,000 of the province's 25,000 votes. This year election officials declared that he won barely one-fourth.

One possible explanation for this drop may have been the presence of Lieutenant Francisco Antonio Vega, a tall, tough man with muscular arms and shoulders and a bulging belly. He was one of several officers sent before the election to vital points of the Republic by the Armed Forces Instruction Center (CEFA), comprising the elite tank and infantry units of the San Isidro Air Force Base outside Santo Domingo. The key element in every coup attempted since Trujillo's death and in the efforts to crush the 1965 revolution, these units were commanded until last year by General Elias Wessin y Wessin. Lieutenant Vega was evidently assigned the job of electoral management and intimidation for the district of Salcedo.

On voting day, Vega proceeded with a detachment of soldiers among the rural polling places. When they reached poll Number 27 in the rural barrio of Las Cuevas, according to witnesses, he pointed his machine gun at the line of voters and shouted, "Viva la Democracia!" — ironically, a leitmotif of the Trujillo dictatorship. The Army, police, and Spanish-born parish priests had been telling the peasants that the main issue was "Communism" (Bosch) vs. "Democracy" (Balaguer). "Do you believe in God?" the illiterate and religious peasantry was asked, again and again. "Then vote for Balaguer."

The PRO, 14th of June and Social Christian leaders in Salcedo told me that the town's two parish priests, responsible for distributing U.S. Food for Peace in the area, gave it to the Army for distribution during the campaign. The Air Force conveyed its more minatory message by buzzing low over several towns of the Cibao region, while other Air Force planes, more subtly, dropped photographs spuriously composed to show Bosch and Castro embracing.

The police, too, participated in the campaign of intimidation. On Sunday May 15 at 8 P.M., in the nearby town of Luperón, Luis Santos Reynoso — mother of six children — was shot dead by two policemen, Francisco Escalante Santana and Juan Acosta, as she shouted "Viva Juan Bosch." Not only were the policemen never punished, but after the shooting troops from the town's Army fort — every town in the tiny Republic has a fort, and the Commander is traditionally the chief figure in the area — were posted at critical points in the town and on its highway approaches, preventing PRD leaders from reaching Luperón to investigate.

On the same afternoon, Justo Rafael Cáceres, PRD Congressional candidate in the neighboring town of Maca, had his nose broken by a soldier who hit him in the face with a rifle butt, was brought under arrest to the town's fort, and there beaten again. On election eve in the barrio Fanchito de las Vargas, in the nearby province of Puerto Plata, five soldiers appeared to warn the peasants of the pro-Bosch community that if Bosch won there no one would remain alive the following day. The five soldiers stayed to supervise the voting until the polls closed the next day.

Meanwhile, at the end of the polling at Barrio Las Cuevas of Salcedo. Lieutenant Vega, wearing his CEPA insignia on his breast pocket, banished the poll-watchers and Election Board officials and left the ballots to be counted by a soldier and a policeman. This procedure, of course, violated Dominican electoral law, which prohibits the military from approaching within 50 yards of the voting place unless summoned by election officials to keep order. The law also entitles representatives of each party to witness the counting and receive tally sheets before the ballots for each candidate are placed in separate bags and taken — in the company of party delegates if they wish — to the municipal Electoral Board office.

"We knew we were strong in some places and that Balaguer was strong in others," said a PRD leader from the area. "The trouble was that our votes never appeared. Our party was disorganized and afraid and Balaguer's people were well-financed. We never even got the tally sheets from many of the polls in rural areas. Either the electoral officials and the soldier refused to provide them or our PRD poll-watchers, mostly peasants, did not dare to demand them, since all Dominican peasants are terrified of the Armed Forces." In the urban zone of Salcedo, the ballots from three of the seven voting places, once in the hands of the Army and police, took 22 hours after the closing of the polls to reach the Electoral Board office three blocks away.

The reports from other areas, though inadequate, tended to corroborate what we learned on our trip through the Cibao. Said one team of U.S. and foreign observers for the Dominican Human Rights Commission about what they saw before the polls closed in the Western frontier province of Bahoruco: "In general we should say that there was an extremely close collaboration between the police and the Partido Reformista. Many persons in the town complained about this obvious fact. One of the most obvious things we noticed was the organized way in which the voters were transported from one place to another." The task of poll-watching was complicated this year by a new ruling allowing voters to cast their ballots anywhere in the Republic, not just in the place of residence listed on their *cédula*.

From our own observations, it seems fair to conclude that the election was dominated by the military, and that the military justified all of its actions in the name of "anti-Communism." A half-hour before the polls closed, the Army Chief of Staff in Santo Domingo sent a coded telegram to all bases in the Cibao saying: "We have been informed that the Leftists, as soon as they know Juan Bosch has lost the election, will attack the Army camps. Take extreme measures accordingly." There was no Leftist uprising, perhaps because of the extreme measures taken by the Army, which apparently anticipated great trouble over the election results.

On May 24, the Chief of Staff wired three brigade commanders: "We have been informed that the Communists of San Pedro de Macoris have a plan that if Juan Bosch doesn't win, on

June 2 the taller buildings of the city such as the governor's palace and the schools will be occupied with the purpose of establishing strongpoints in these places. It is possible that this plan will be carried out in all the cities of the country." (On the same day Army posts were advised that "Colonel Joslin, Lieutenant Colonel McGinn, Captain Santori. and Señor Miguel A. Perez of the North American military mission" which has been openly hostile to Bosch — and in 1963, according to Sam Halper in THE NEW LEADER of May 10, 1965, provided the "wink from the Pentagon" that led to his overthrow — would be visiting the cities of Santiago, Moca, La Vega, Bonao, Villa Bisono, Monte Cristi, Dajabón Restauración, Lomas de Cabrera, San Juan de la Maguana, Bánica, and Las Matas de Farfón. But Embassy sources said Perez was not a member of the U.S. military mission or the Embassy staff.)

Another telegram dated May 27, from the General Staff, said that "according to reports received an uprising will occur May 30-31 in Santiago and La Vega. Attacks are contemplated against houses of military men and civilians to obtain a violent reaction in those places." Since neither this nor any of the other anticipated uprisings actually occurred, it would seem that the April 1965 revolution has created the same kind of paranoid hostility toward Bosch's supporters on the part of the Dominican military that developed between Peru's Army and the APRA party of Victor Raul Maya de la Torre after the 1931 revolution in the city of Trujillo Peru.

It is still impossible, of course, to judge the full extent, provenance, and consequences of the various electoral malfeasances in the Dominican Republic. And the investigation promised by PRO leaders was designed more to appease an indignant following and improve the party's position in political negotiations than to change the result. But regardless of the cumulative impact of the offenses on the election, the undoubted ability of Rightist soldiers and policemen to terrorize the population and dominate the electoral procedures in many localities does not bode well for the much-expressed hope that Balaguer will now be able to subject the military to effective civilian authority.

The distressing upshot of these past 14 months is that all the violence has brought no change: The country is still being run, to the extent it is being governed by Dominicans, from the San Isidro Air Force Base, where the tank and infantry and jet fighter units were assembled by the dictator's son Ramfis nearly a decade ago. After helping to return Balaguer to the presidency, the military was out in the streets taking over. On the second night after the polls closed, infantry troops from San Isidro attacked the Santo Domingo house of Hector Aristy, a leader of the pro-Bosch 1965 uprising, killing Aristy's cook and one of his bodyguards. On June 6, troops in Barahona, near the Haiti frontier, surrounded the home of a PRD leader Yuyu Mitchel Severo, who had found a discarded ballot box and brought it to his house as evidence of fraud.

The economy is in a shambles, with foreign companies pulling out and the huge nationalized Trujillo sugar mills and plantations producing at three times the world price, thus threatening to become the kind of economic burden that the Bolivian tin mines have been since nationalization. To build this gigantic sugar production complex, Trujillo drove thousands of peasant families off the land, doubling the population of Santo Domingo between 1950-60. For many, if not most, of the peasant-born slum-dwellers there is still no work.

Bosch and Balaguer met after the election for two hours in the house of a mutual friend. Bosch reportedly told Balaguer that he could govern with the mailed fist of San Isidro or the acquiescence of the PRO, but not with both. This choice presumes a control over the military which Balaguer has yet to demonstrate. Bosch has been calming his followers by talking of staying in the country, reorganizing his party, and carrying out "constructive normal political activity such as was never known in Santo Domingo." If Bosch does convert from a professional exile to a national politician, it will be a significant change. But this resolve may not survive the repression occurring now.

Though Rafael Trujillo has been dead for five years and Juan Bosch was defeated, both will continue to affect this wretched country for many years to come. The old dictator's apparatus of repression is still largely intact, and Bosch's mission of reform, essential to ultimate stability, remains unfulfilled.

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ngall@braudel.org.br