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# BOOK WORLD

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*The one we got away with*



**INTERVENTION AND NEGOTIATION: The United States and the Dominican Revolution.** By Jerome Slater. Illustrated. Harper & Row, 288 pp. \$7.95.

**By Ronald Steel**

Remember Colonel Elias Wessin y Wessin? Or Donald Reid Cabral? Or José Molina Urena and Hector Imbert? How about W. Tapley Bennett and Hector García Godoy? Or surely John Bartlow Martin, Juan Bosch, Joaquín Balaguer and Ellsworth Bunker? Don't they ring a bell somewhere in the dim recesses of the mind where we store the personalities of our various interventions? These gentlemen, of course, were part of the cast of that little affair in the Dominican Republic, a couple of interventions ago back in 1965. You know, the one we got away with.

For those who have pushed aside these names to

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make room in their heads for the dramatis personae of our current road show in Cambodia, let us recall that Col. W & W in 1963 overthrew the legally elected government of the Dominican Republic and sent President Juan Bosch into exile, that the military junta replaced him with Cabral, a smooth businessman from a distinguished (that is, rich) Dominican family, before his incompetence led him to be overthrown in April 1965 by a counter-coup from the left designed to restore Bosch to power. Although they had widespread public support and had set up a provisional government under Molina, the "constitutionalists," as they were called, were opposed by more conservative elements of the military, who hated Bosch. Led by W & W, some military units decided to resist the revolution. They were vastly outnumbered, however, and were weakened by the defection of many of their own soldiers. Just as they were on the point of defeat, the American ambassador, the courtly Mr. Bennett from Georgia, sent a telegram to Lyndon B. Johnson calling for help.

At this point the story becomes more familiar. Ameri-

can troops rushed to Santo Domingo, ostensibly to protect imperiled American citizens, but actually, as soon became apparent, to defeat the revolution and prevent unnamed "communists" from seizing power. The constitutionalists were defeated by Col. W & W, with a little help from his friends, and John Bartlow Martin, former ambassador to the Dominican Republic under Kennedy, was dispatched to straighten things out. Martin promptly made a mess of everything and soon was replaced by a succession of emissaries, including McGeorge Bundy and Cyrus Vance—but not before he had set up a government under Imbert, who was so detested that no responsible Dominican would agree to serve in his dictatorial regime. Exit Martin, enter Ellsworth Bunker, former businessman (director of the National Sugar Refining Corporation) turned ambassador, and currently proconsul to Saigon, who installed a provisional government under Hector Garcia-Godoy which set the stage for the withdrawal of U.S. troops and for free elections. In 1966 the conservative Balaguer defeated Bosch, and was reelected in May 1970, to Washington's audible relief.

Happy ending? Not exactly. The Dominican economy is stagnating, with per capita income lower than in 1960, between one-quarter and one-half the labor force is unemployed, the left is subject to a continuing terrorism that sees daily political murders and "suicides" of political prisoners. Unwilling or unable to control this political violence and economic unrest, Balaguer has lost support to Wessin, who poses the danger of a rightist dictatorship, and to the splintered Bosch forces on the left which are rejecting electoral politics in favor of revolution and "popular dictatorship." Even should the Dominican Republic not explode again, the intervention took a high political toll of the participants: The Organization of American States has been discredited as a supine instrument of the State Department, Latin American oligarchies have been confirmed in their belief that Washington will bail them out when the going gets rough, Latin generals have been encouraged to intervene in political affairs, and in the eyes of many at home and abroad, the U.S. came off as a clumsy imperialist ready to crush any client state that threatens to get out of hand.

It could, of course, have turned out even worse. Had it not been for a combination of fortuitous circumstances, we might now be fighting against a Dominican guerrilla army of "national liberation." The fact that we are not has less to do with the wisdom of American policy in the Caribbean than the fact that there was no political base for a national resistance movement against the foreign invaders (us), and that the communists were few and ineffectual (which meant there was no reason to intervene at all).

From the beginning it was (Continued on page 3)



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(Continued from page 1) a sordid affair, based on a heritage of intervention stretching back to the occupation by the U.S. Marines from 1916-24, thirty years of accommodation to the tyrannical Trujillo regime, a neo-colonial relationship that makes the Dominican Republic dependent on the U.S. for some 75 per cent of its trade, an interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine that considers the Caribbean a U.S. lake, a knee-jerk anti-communism that sees a threat to the national security wherever a handful of Marxists gather, and a failure to examine the tired assumptions that American policy makers have been chained to for the past quarter century. Lyndon Johnson sent American troops to the Dominican Republic, Jerome Slater concludes in *Intervention and Negotiation*, because "in 1965 the United States was a prisoner, both at home and abroad, of its own oversimplifications, myths, and outmoded policies."

Slater, an associate professor at the State University of New York at Buffalo, has written the most complete, the most objective, and the most authoritative account of the Dominican intervention, one that will remain a source book for anyone interested in what happened, why it happened, and, alas, why it may well be repeated elsewhere unless some attitudes are radically revised. While his sympathies lie with the reformers, and while

he looks upon the intervention as a disastrous mistake, he does not heap the entire blame on Lyndon Johnson, and indeed makes clear that the overall policy that led to the invasion was "much more a creation of the Kennedy administration than of the Johnson administration." He also takes to task those such as Theodore Draper and Senator Fulbright who maintain that the U.S. intervened to prevent the return of Bosch or to restore the status quo.

Johnson, Slater argues, was committed to free elections from the outset of the intervention, and while opposed to Bosch, would not formally have prevented his return to power if freely elected. But he does severely criticize the administration for intervening at all, showing that there was no serious risk of a communist takeover, and stating that, even if there were, "another Cuba" would not represent a security threat to the U.S. The Johnson administration, however, could not admit this. It was a prisoner of its own oft-proclaimed cold war rhetoric, and it was fearful of public opinion. In Slater's caustic words,

Reasonable men could and in fact did fear that a successful Communist revolution in the Dominican Republic might well jeopardize the future of the Democratic party in the United States.

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Like the Cuban missile crisis three years earlier, the Dominican intervention was dictated in part by domestic political considerations. Having failed to revise its policies in the light of new realities, the Johnson administration, like its predecessors and its successor, made itself the prisoner of its own bankrupt premises. There is more to the story than this, for U.S. policy makers, irrespective of real or imagined attitudes held by the public, are deeply hostile to revolution in the authoritarian, impoverished countries of the Third World. Even if it were a victim of its own (perhaps mistaken) view of what the voters would tolerate, nonetheless the Johnson administration, as Slater points out, "refused to use the opportunity to effect really sweeping military reform" to bring about social change after it had intervened to "save" the Dominican Republic from "communism." U.S. policy was, and remains,

conditioned on the very explicit premise that whatever its faults, the Dominican military is an essential force for "order" and "stability" and that, therefore, nothing must be done that would seriously weaken it.

So long as that attitude remains unchanged, we have probably not yet seen our last intervention in the Caribbean. No more Dominican Republics? Don't bet on it. \*