

# SANTO DOMINGO:

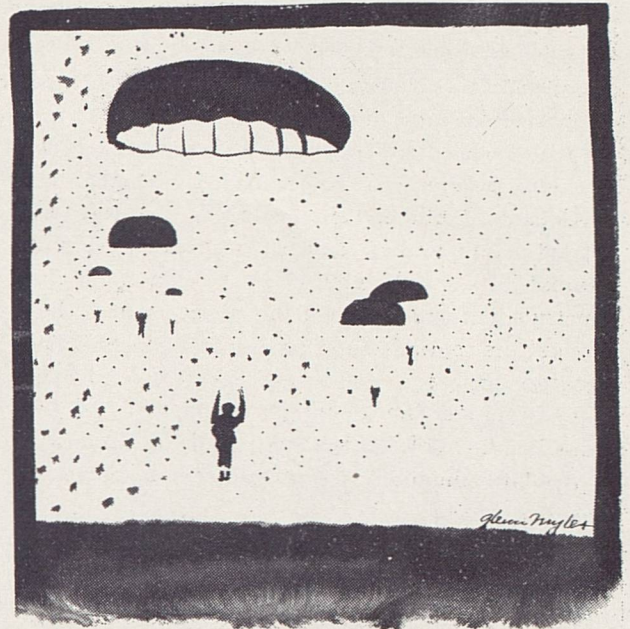
## THE U.S. WINS ANOTHER BATTLE

### ABDUL KARIM

The brazen intervention by the United States into the internal affairs of the Dominican Republic is, of course, a reversion to the gunboat diplomacy of T.R.'s day. Contrary to how it may appear, the naked use of force exposes not the strength, but the *weakness* of American foreign policy. The U.S. could find no ally to join its piratical adventure. It steered clear of the United Nations because it knew its designs would be unceremoniously rebuffed. True, the OAS rubber-stamped its intervention when it was a *fait accompli*, but that simply exposed the OAS as a stooge-creation of the State Department. The wave of bitterness and distrust that swept through Latin America did more to enhance Castro than months of broadcasts about "Yankee Imperialism" beaming out of Radio Havana.

In the initial stage of the invasion, under the guise of "protecting American lives", President Johnson sent in 7,000 marines. It is worth examining even this flimsy pretext. Apparently, white American skin is so special, so precious, so sacred, that the notion of its being punctured by a bullet is clearly unthinkable. Of course, it is well known that those who happen to possess black (or yellow) skin are not as sensitive. They do not bleed as humanly when they are machine-gunned nor do their bodies burn with as pungent an odor when sprayed with napalm. Are American policy-makers really prepared to "send in the marines" wherever and whenever its nationals happen to stand in the way of progress? That'll be spreading our boys pretty thin, but as a starter, why not Boguloosa, La.?

When it was announced that the taskforce had swollen to 20,000 troops in order to cope with 58 (or was it 37 or 69?) known communists and Castroites reported to be active on the constitutionalists' side of the barricades, Washington's rue intentions in the Dominican Republic started



to come into focus. Not that there was the slightest chance of a communist take-over (The American Press deserves credit for exposing its own government's lies.) But even the restoration of a liberal like Bosch represents a threat to the United States. And yet how can a regime that believes in free elections, law and order, the sacredness of private property be a menace to the Colossus of the North, the bastion of the free world? Some facts on the long-standing economic interests in the Dominican Republic should shed light on its real motives for invading this "independent nation."

The island of Hispaniola ("Little Spain"), which Santo Domingo shares with Haiti, covers an area of 28,299 square miles. Bound by the Atlantic on the north, the Mona Channel on the east, the Carribean on the south and the Windward Passage on the west, the island lies 54 miles from Puerto Rico, 50 miles from Cuba — and 140 miles from Miami at the nearest point. The Dominican Republic, which occupies the larger half of the island, is about the size of New Hampshire and Vermont combined and less than half

the size of Cuba. As for what is on the island that might attract latter-day buccaneers out for super-profits, the United States Commission of Inquiry to Santo Domingo reported in 1871, "The resources of the country are vast and various, and its products may be increased with scarcely any other limit than the labor expended upon them.

European businessmen got there first. The impoverished country, plagued by the disastrous effects of slavery, insurrection and political instability, was easy prey for these vultures. The way they operated was to persuade the Dominican government (with bribes smoothing the way) to get into debt with a loan granted at exorbitant interest rates and secured by mortgages on the country's resources. When the government failed to meet its obligation, these businessmen confiscated property, imposing exacting demands that strangled the country's economy. As the historian Otto Schoenrich described the situation in the late nineteenth century in his book *Santo Domingo* (p.354):

In making its very first loan, in 1869, the Dominican government fell into the hands of sharpers and was mercilessly fleeced. The bargain, even if it had been honestly carried out, was improvident enough. Reduced to American money the nominal amount of the loan was \$3,788,500; of this amount the Republic was to receive but \$1,600,000; yet it contracted to pay as interest and sinking fund in twenty-five years a sum amounting to \$7,362,500. The contractors for the loan, Hartmont & Co., of London, were authorized to retain \$500,000 as their commission. In fact, however, no more than \$190,455 was ever paid to the Dominican government.

In 1892, three American lawyers inherited a similar loan scheme when they took over the interests of Westendorf & Co., a Dutch firm, and called it the Santo Domingo Improvement Co. Subsequently, two other companies, the Santo Domingo Finance Co. and the Company of the Central Dominican Railway were incorporated as auxiliaries of the Improvement Co. It is reported that public opinion in the Dominican Republic during this burgeoning of American economic penetration was almost unanimously hostile. Schoenrich cites the Santo Domingo Improvement Co. as the prime factor in bringing about U.S. occupation of the Republic from 1916 to 1924.

The next great prize to sweeten the imperialist pot was sugar. The introduction of steam sugar mills in the 1870s stimulated large foreign investments in sugar plantations and to this day foreign domination of this industry prevails. It has put the Dominican Republic at the mercy of the United States to dispose of its lopsided sugar production — as Cuba was at one time at its mercy. M.M. Knight, the economist, in his book *The Americans in Santo Domingo*, has flatly stated:

Cane sugar, as cultivated at present, is the curse of the West Indies. In Santo Domingo, it leads to the foreign ownership of huge tracts of the best land.

Santo Domingo remains basically an economic colony of the United States. According to Moody's *Municipal & Government Manual*, Dominican exports of sugar in 1961 (the latest figures available) were valued at \$69,000,000 and represented about 50% of the total value of exports. Not only are the sugar refining mills mostly in American hands; the total value of American investment in the Dominican Republic is \$108,000,000 about 1/7th of its Gross National Product (\$773,200,000)!

While absentee American capitalists wax fat and happy, 70% of the working population in the Dominican Republic is condemned to seasonal agricultural employment with a per capita income of

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\$228 a year. Another interesting fact from the *Statistical Abstract of Latin America* should not be overlooked—by and large, Santo Domingo is a black republic. Out of a total population of 3,329,575, only 28% is white; the remaining 72%, black or mulatto.

Clearly, it was to protect Wall Street's investments that the U.S. cynically intervened to head off the popular revolt against the rule of the (U.S.-trained) generals in Santo Domingo. American policy makers desperately are trying to freeze the status quo, to keep things the way they are. And that is the reason they trot out the myth of "imminent communist takeover" and "communist subversion." They are obsessed by dominoes (those expansive black rectangles with tiny white eyes) and their sleep is plagued with nightmares in which the

fall of a domino sounds like an H-bomb exploding. The Johnson Administration fears that if another country is permitted to succumb to an "alien ideology" like Cuba, the idea may become contagious and dominoes will start falling all over the Southern Hemisphere. What Washington refuses to realize is that it can't stop the dominoes of time. The so-called "alien-ideology" that is stirring oppressed people everywhere is not really communism but revolutionary nationalism—a struggle to determine one's own destiny. No matter what force is brought up against it, this idea will survive like a guerilla in the crevices of the human brain. As one of the "rebel" leaders, Melegarejo, told American reporters, "You may win this battle, but you will lose the war."

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