



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Dominican citizens general strike for free democratic elections, 1961-1962

Time period notes: *First general strike lasted for 12 days, beginning in late November and ending in early December, 1961. It was later resumed in January 1962 until President Balaguer resigned from office*

Late November

1961

to: Mid January

1962

Country: Dominican Republic

Goals:

To force acting President Joaquín Balaguer to resign and to introduce free democratic elections.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 032. Taunting officials
- 117. General strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

- 117. General strike

Notes on Methods:

The campaigners also blocked roads with trees as part of the protest.

There are no tactics in segments 2-5 because during this time Balaguer had agreed to incorporate opposition groups in the government. However, the campaigners resumed the campaign when he dissolved the State Council.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Group characterization:

- Anti-Trujillo Groups
- National Civic Union Supporters

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

National Civic Union, Viriato Fiallo (leader of NCU)

Partners:

Dominican Revolutionary Party, Other Opposition Groups

External allies:

Not known.

Involvement of social elites:

Not known.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Anti-Trujillo Groups
- National Civic Union Supporters

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 2 weeks*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

President Joaquin Balaguer, General Pedro Rodriguez Echaverria and his armed forces, Trujillo Supporters

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known.

Campaigner violence:

Some reported fights broke out between protesters and police forces.

Repressive Violence:

Soldiers and police used tear gas and noise grenades to combat NCU

supporters and other opposition groups. Soldiers and police beat and arrested protesters.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The general strike that was initiated by the National Civic Union achieved its goals of removing President Joaquin Balaguer from office and introducing free democratic elections in the Dominican Republic. Although the victory was short-lived and the protesters could not maintain their victory due to several external forces, the campaign was successful in achieving its initial goals. However, it was only given 4 points for success in achieving goals because these reforms did not last very long.

The campaign only grew a small amount after the first actions.

The National Civic Union has survived

Through several decades in the 20

th

century, the Dominican Republic remained under the rule of the dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, nicknamed “El Jefe.” With major support from the United States, the Trujillo dictatorship remained intact for over thirty years, during which brutal oppression and secret killings of political dissidents were the norm. Newspapers and other media outlets were strictly censored and Trujillo’s gangs of secret police terrorized the public. During this time, it was not uncommon for a critic of the Trujillo regime to be kidnapped by thugs driving license-less black cars and to be found days later lying beaten, bloody, and broken in the sugarcane fields.

Thus, the assassination of El Jefe in May of 1961 brought major tumultuous changes to the small Caribbean nation. The killing initiated a national cry for democratic change and free general elections. Anti-Trujillo groups and the civilian-supported National Civic Union (NCU) demanded that President Joaquin Balaguer, who had been installed in office by Trujillo and who continued to implement the regime’s oppressive policies, resign from his position and allow free democratic elections to ensue.

When Balaguer refused to resign or consolidate power, the NCU called for a general strike to weaken the Balaguer government. Led by Dr. Viriato Fillaou, NCU supporters and other anti-Trujillo groups effectively shut down businesses and felled trees across streets to block public transit. Violent disputes between the opposition and police forces often broke out as NCU supporters taunted soldiers with jeers of “Boo Boo Balaguer!”. Despite numerous arrests and the military’s use of tear gas and noise grenades, Balaguer was unable to quell the opposition.

By the twelfth day of the crippling strike, Balaguer agreed to incorporate the NCU and other opposition groups into his government, but refused to resign. After negotiations, Balaguer agreed to modify the state constitution and create a State Council that would include NCU members and other opposition group representatives. The State Council “...would exercise both legislative and executive powers until a new democratic constitution was drafted and free general elections were held one year later” (Pons, 383).

However, on 16 January 1962, Balaguer dissolved the State Council and installed a civilian-military junta in its place. Opposition leaders and their supporters struck back with a resumption of the general strike, which effectively dissolved the junta and forced Balaguer to resign from the Presidency. Two days later, Balaguer was ousted from the country.

The State Council was reinstated and served as a transitional government until free general elections were held on 20 December 1962. Juan Bosch of the Dominican Revolutionary Party was elected President, but remained in power for only 7 months as former regime leaders, including Balaguer, continued to vie for political power. With such political instability, the Dominican Republic fell into civil war. Throughout this tumultuous time, the United States played a major role in Dominican political affairs as it carried out several CIA operations in the country and deployed thousands of U.S. military troops to prevent Bosch and his supporters from regaining power. [Particularly, while warning of “communism,” the U.S. was afraid that Bosch would establish a socialist democracy in the DR. -GL]

Despite these later developments, the general strike that was initiated by the National Civic Union achieved its goals of removing President Joaquin Balaguer from office and introducing free democratic elections in the Dominican Republic. Although the victory was short-lived and the protesters could not maintain their victory due to several internal and external forces, the campaign was successful in achieving its initial goals.

Research Notes

Sources:

“Dominican Republic: Revolution Aborted”. Time Magazine. 8 December 1961.
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,895768,00.html>>

“Dominican Republic: Dancing in the Streets.” Time Magazine. 15 December 1961.
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,827075,00.html>>

Kurlansky, Mark. “The Dominican Republic; in the Land of the Blind Caudillo.” New York Times. 6 August 1989.

Pons, Frank M. The Dominican Republic: A National History. First Markus Wiener Publishers. Princeton, 1995. Pp. 382-383.

Additional Notes:

US involvement in the Dominican Republic was especially high

during this time. US policy-makers were opposed to a Bosch-regime and thus carried out several CIA operations and deployed thousands of military troops to prevent Bosch and his supporters from assuming power. [Particularly, while warning of “communism,” the U.S. was afraid that Bosch would establish a socialist democracy in the DR. -GL].

Edited by Max Rennebohm (07/05/2011)

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Aden Tedla, 20/02/2010

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