

LaRouche's economics debated in the Dominican Republic

by Cynthia Rush

In riding through the capital city of Santo Domingo, one is struck by two things. First, its beauty—streets lined with palm trees and brilliantly colored tropical flowers, large parks alongside the ocean, and a sense of urban planning and spaciousness. Second is simply the realization that Santo Domingo is the oldest city in the Western Hemisphere, founded in 1496 during the second of Christopher Columbus's four trips to the New World.

Especially now, as all of Ibero-America's governments prepare for next year's celebration of the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America—Santo Domingo will be the site of the Pope's meeting with Ibero-American bishops—there is tremendous pride taken in Santo Domingo's heritage. In a few brief hours of visiting the city's colonial zone with my colleague Ricardo Olvera of the Mexican chapter of the Schiller Institute, I caught a glimpse of the richness of this small country's history and culture, as well as a deeper understanding of just how important next year's anniversary will be for the whole nation, and the continent.

An enormous battle is shaping up around this celebration, reflected most immediately in the debate over economic policy. This is being fought out not only inside Ibero-American governments, but within the Catholic Church as well, as we discovered. With his numerous interventions, and now with the publication of his latest encyclical *Centesimus annus* on the centennial of Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum*, Pope John Paul II has intensified his polemic against liberal capitalism, and the destruction it has wrought in the developing sector. In the Pope's view, the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America must be the occasion for the launching of a "new evangelization" in which economic policy is coherent with the social doctrine of the Church which places the defense of the dignity of man above all other concerns.

Opposing the Pope are the defenders of free market economics and free trade, whose principal proponent was the 18th-century agent of the British Empire, Adam Smith. These are the policies which are responsible for the devastation in Ibero-America today, seen most horribly in the rapid spread of cholera throughout the continent.

We got our first taste of this debate during our first public event in Santo Domingo, an April 8 conference proclaiming,

"There Is an Alternative to Neo-Liberalism," which was attended by approximately 150 businessmen, politicians, congressmen, and media. My presentation documented in some detail the collapse of the U.S. economy, attacked the fascist nature of George Bush's "new world order," and presented the dirigist economic alternative outlined by jailed U.S. economist Lyndon H. LaRouche. I made a point of emphasizing that LaRouche is a political prisoner in the United States today because he has consistently opposed the free trade policies of "the liar Adam Smith," and the malthusian depopulation and genocide schemes backed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and Anglo-American think tanks.

Ricardo Olvera followed with a presentation on *Operation Juárez*, the program put forward by LaRouche in 1982, which called for the creation of an Ibero-American common market and declaration of a debt moratorium. Using slides from the 1986 Schiller Institute book, *Ibero-American Integration*, which fleshes out *Operation Juárez*, Olvera discussed several key infrastructure projects, and pointed out that their implementation would require rapid population growth in what is actually an underpopulated continent.

Surprisingly, as the discussion period began, the first "question" came from a Father Nuñez Collado. Reportedly more businessman than priest, Father Nuñez Collado was irate at what he termed the "unscientific" nature of the presentations; he ardently defended Adam Smith, who he claimed advocated a fair distribution of society's goods and services to all people, and railed against "irresponsible" population growth.

Dracula in the blood bank

Ricardo Olvera blasted Nuñez in later remarks, noting appropriately that Adam Smith was a proponent of the bestial doctrine of social Darwinism which calls for distributing crumbs among the poor, then seeing which of the "fittest" survive. Olvera eloquently asserted that Christian economics, and the social doctrine of the Church, place the sovereignty of man—created in the image and likeness of God—above all else.

Who is Father Nuñez Collado? An article in the April 11 issue of the daily *El Caribe* answered the question. The paper

reported that Msgr. Agripino Nuñez Collado, rector of the Catholic University and the priest's brother, was sponsoring a conference on "The Social Doctrine of the Church and Economic Policies for Development." Co-sponsored by the Ibero-American Bishops Conference, CELAM, and a local group, the International Center for Economic Development, the conference had invited none other than former Panamanian President Nicolás Ardito Barletta and the Peruvian guru of the "informal economy," Hernando de Soto, to speak on this topic! As one longtime observer of Ibero-American politics noted, "this is like inviting Dracula to work in the blood bank."

Barletta, a former World Bank vice president, helped to set up Panama's offshore banking apparatus, through which drug money flowed while he was President. De Soto, the darling of the Bush administration, is intent on destroying the last vestiges of democratic institutions in Peru in order to guarantee implementation of the World Bank's "structural reform." How could either of these criminals be qualified to discuss what economic policy is coherent with the social doctrine of the Church? Obviously a faction within the Church disagrees with the Pope, but even its representatives were nervous enough about the offense implied by Barletta and De Soto's presence that they held the conference behind closed doors.

'The IMF without the IMF'

What is going on inside the Dominican Republic that it requires the deployment of two such evil representatives of the Anglo-American political establishment?

To date, the government of 89-year-old President Joaquín Balaguer has refused to sign a standby agreement with the IMF, and is under enormous pressure to do so. This is not to say that Balaguer, who was barely reelected in 1990, has not applied the Fund's austerity dictates. As one government official told us almost proudly, "we've imposed IMF policy without the IMF." A group of trade unionists with whom we met confirmed huge price increases in electricity, fuel, and other basic services, and offered proof that the government will physically repress anyone who opposes this policy. One worker showed us his arm and leg, both in a cast, as a result of police repression of a recent sit-in at a local church.

However, one thing that bothers the IMF about the government is the fact that over the past four years, Balaguer has built, and continues to build, a number of infrastructure projects. These include highways, housing projects, some of which are low-cost, and dams; several other projects to improve potable water and electricity infrastructure in Santo Domingo are in the works.

The Balaguer government is not made up of your typical Harvard-trained technocrat—no Salinas de Gortaris here. This is the old school—*very* old judging from Balaguer's age—whose agenda may differ somewhat from what Bush and the banks want, despite longstanding ties to the United

States. It was undoubtedly useful to the government to have spokesmen for Lyndon H. LaRouche in the country for a few days, offering an alternative to the IMF's genocide. One government official made a point of emphasizing to us that LaRouche "was gaining great prestige in jail," since it was clear he was there because of his political beliefs. On April 9, the host of the "Revista 110" television broadcast, Julio Hazim, interviewed us for 90 minutes on the LaRouche economic program, his status as a political prisoner, Bush's "new world order," and the U.S. economic collapse.

Representatives of human rights groups who heard reports on the legal persecution of LaRouche and his associates by a federally coordinated task force were shocked at the barbarity of the persecution, and promised to act on the case.

Hope for the future

Throughout our stay in Santo Domingo, Olvera and I often commented on both the tremendous openness and the political sharpness of the people we met everywhere we went. This seemed to be a universal quality among the racially diverse population—a mixture of white, black, Indian, and mestizo. Nowhere was this openness more evident than at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD), founded in 1538, where we spoke to a total of 600 students over two nights. The UASD is the state-run university, whose lack of funds is matched by the poverty of its mostly working class students. Although in the middle of exams, for two nights they gathered in the main lecture hall to hear our presentations on the collapsing U.S. economy, Ibero-American integration, the U.S. war against Iraq, and Bush's new world order. We were bombarded with questions and comments and several students representing organizations wanted to meet to discuss further collaboration.

There were no frivolous questions. On the second night, moved by a viewing of a 17-minute *EIR* video of the devastation of U.S. bombing raids against Iraq, one young woman got up to eloquently urge that everyone become politically active, in whatever way they could, to solve the urgent problems facing the Dominican Republic. She reminded the audience that many students travel long distances to come to class, and often have trouble concentrating or learning, because they are hungry; that they damage their eyes and their health, because they study in homes without electricity or potable water.

I was also especially struck by the dedication of the economics professors at UASD. Several had studied in the U.S. and could obviously have commanded better salaries at any private institution than the state-run university. But they were committed to staying where they were and teaching these excellent young people for whom the UASD is the only hope of getting an education; they graciously shared their meager resources with us, and welcomed debate on the crucial issue of economic policy. Of our week's stay in Santo Domingo, I remember our experience at UASD most fondly.