The Dominican Left

written by Amaury Rodríguez | February 4, 2026

The Dominican Republic's revolutionary left is caught in a continuous crisis at a time when the Dominican state is under the complete control of the capitalist class and the far right is on the rise both locally and internationally. Mostly self-identified as Marxist-Leninist and generally Maoist-inspired, these left-wing organizations emerged in the 1960s and were quite active throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. One main distinguishable trait of these organizations is their membership composition, that is, historical militants with an average age around seventy years old.

The old Dominican left has a strong connection with environmental struggles that focus on the fight against mining multinationals like Barrick Gold and in defense of all natural resources. Meanwhile, there are almost no leftist worker or student organizations. With a draconian labor code that prohibits strikes and the ongoing neoliberal assault on public education, the existing labor unions and student organizations play a marginal role in the fight against state repression and the co-optation of activists by political parties, NGOs, and the state. Although there are small feminist, LGBTQ, and anti-racist youth collectives, their political orientation does not fully align with leftist or revolutionary politics.

Similar to other countries in the Caribbean and Latin America, waves of revolutionary struggle and authoritarian political shifts tend to shape and influence the direction of Dominican politics. In that respect, the old Dominican left follows in the footsteps of the campist/tankie left in their blind support of bureaucratic socialist states. On top of it all and in total contradiction with revolutionary politics, these left-wing organizations sympathize with the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) economic bloc that not only continues to trade with the racist Zionist state carrying out the Gaza genocide but also includes far-right governments like that of Russia's Vladimir Putin and India's Narendra Modi. Operating with a Cold-War mentality, BRICS governments champion the idea of a multipolar capitalist world order divided into distinct geopolitical camps in confrontation with U.S. imperialism.[1]

At a gathering on July 13, 2025, six left-wing Dominican organizations discussed their present calamity by reflecting on the current state of the left and its future ahead: the Movimiento Popular Dominicano (Dominican Popular Movement, MPD), the Partido Comunista del Trabajo (Communist Party of Labor, PCT), the Movimiento Caamañista (Caamañista Movement, MC), Fuerza de la Revolución (Force of the Revolution, FR), Referente de la Izquierda Dominicana (Reference of the Left, RID) and Partido Patria para Todos y Todas (Fatherland for All Party, PPT). The gathering is part of the old left's goal to mend the rift created by political differences and historical conflicts. According to one participant's report, delegates at the event recognized "the left's mistake in neglecting political work with the working class, peasants, youth, women and the cultural terrain." Moreover, in a rare moment of honesty for a left that has not always been self-critical, attendees admitted that "the left currently lacks a generational change, a serious situation that must be

urgently addressed in order to overcome it."[2]

While it's true that the Dominican left is in need of new blood, the crux of the matter lies beyond generational change. Replacing the old guard without changing political course amounts to no renewal or change at all. Besides age, the main problem facing the Dominican left is class and ideological collaboration as some sectors of the old left backed current right-wing President Luis Abinader's presidential campaign in 2020 and even formed alliances with Abinader's party, the pro-market Partido Revolucionario Moderno (Modern Revolutionary Party, PRM). This was the case of the Communist Party of Labor (PCT).[3] But the PCT has a track record of opportunist electoralism. In 2007, the PCT's secretary general caused a stir when he and other members met with Pedro de Jesús Candelier, a former head of police with a long history of police brutality and extrajudicial killings who was running for president on a tough-on-crime, populist platform.[4]

While sectors of the old left support electoral politics and have no qualms about outright class collaboration, left-wing groups such as the Caamañista Movement (named after Francisco Alberto Caamaño, one of the leaders of the 1965 revolution) have over the years maintained an abstentionist orientation that has created a disconnect with the working class. The Caamañista Movement's abstention from elections left it politically unprepared when it characterized the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (Dominican Liberation Party, PLD) government as a dictatorship that would never lose elections. As a consequence, the Caamañista Movement did not understand the institutional continuity represented by the PRM winning the elections.[5]

Right-wing Hegemony

Under President Luis Abinader, a wealthy businessman of Lebanese descent and close ally of Washington and the Zionist state, Dominican society is living under an undeclared and de facto state of emergency that has suspended constitutional rights for working-class people, specifically, Haitian immigrants, Dominicans of Haitian origin, and black Dominicans. In a populist response to the demands put forward by the Marcha Verde (Green March) movement that emerged in 2017, and because the old left failed to push the movement beyond liberal demands, Abinader campaigned as a candidate for change based on an anti-corruption and liberal platform that included abortion rights. Using a well-orchestrated marketing campaign, Abinader promised to "restore democracy" and create an "independent justice and separation of powers" (which has completely failed) after two-decades of right-wing rule by the PLD. Abinader soon moved to the right after getting elected.

Coming to power during the Covid-19 crisis, Abinader relied on harsh repressive measures to enforce lockdowns and carry out mass arrests of black Dominican youth in the barrios (poor, working-class neighborhoods) where even partying in the streets came under attack by police forces.

Since 2020, Abinader, while scapegoating Haitian people for the country's social ills, has carried out mass deportations of Haitian immigrants regardless of their legal status. Abinader and his government have also tolerated the growth of the local fascist movement and its paramilitary wing, the Antigua Orden Dominicana (AOD). On March 30, for example, his government allowed a fascist march in Hoyo de Friusa, a mixed Haitian-Dominican neighborhood. This turned out to be an inflammatory provocation meant to further polarize Dominican society on the issue of immigration and continue to spread xenophobia and anti-Haitian racism. Abinader's government not only authorized the march but provided a military escort from the Ministry of Defense at the request of the neo-Nazis. When violence erupted, the government and the AOD unanimously declared that the violence had been the work of mysterious "infiltrators" who were never identified despite dozens of arrests. And finally, the government did what the march demanded: it completely demolished a neighborhood with more than three hundred buildings, to racially cleanse the area. A week later, Abinader announced a series of fifteen anti-Haitian government measures including the elimination

of the right to free public health care for immigrants.[6]

Abinader has not acted alone as the rest of the political class has been complicit in abetting the racist and anti-Haitian campaign under way.

As usual, the ruling class in the Dominican Republic uses racism as a political weapon to divide and rule. As left-wing writer Lilliam Oviedo observes, this current reactionary campaign relying on fascist elements "is aimed at obscuring (and, if possible, denying) the existence of class struggle."[7]

Under such a repressive climate, dissent is barely tolerated and the Dominican left has not been able to effectively challenge President Abinader, the far right, or these reactionary policies. As for the old Dominican left's political weakness vis-à-vis the government, one can mention the missed opportunity during the commemorative march for the sixtieth anniversary of the April 1965 revolution, a march led by the left and that was relatively large and diverse in composition. But when the government demanded that the march be racially cleansed and that organizers not allow Haitian workers to attend, the old Dominican left did nothing to challenge the government's orders. After the march came under repression with a police attack on elderly sugarcane workers and then attacks by fascist paramilitaries when the march dispersed, the leftist organizations that organized the march actually thanked the government for largely respecting the march (and refrained from denouncing the attacks and repression). This created a disconnect with young activists who saw no reason to thank the government.[8]

Meanwhile, large numbers of ordinary people have come to the conclusion that electoral politics will not lead to real change while the lack of progressive or revolutionary alternatives continues to leave the political field open to right-wing nationalism and far-right politics.[9]

An Ongoing Crisis

The crisis of the Dominican left is not a new phenomenon. It has its roots in the *Doce Años* (Twelve Year) period under President Joaquín Balaguer (1966–1978) who presided over a counter-revolutionary regime put in place by U.S. occupation troops after the defeat of the 1965 democratic revolution that aimed to restore Juan Bosch to power. Deposed in a U.S.-backed right-wing military coup in 1963, Bosch's reformist government represented a breath of fresh air after becoming the first democratically elected government since the fall of the U.S. aligned, pro-Israel Trujillo dictatorship in 1961.

A staunch anti-communist, Balaguer's extermination campaign against revolutionary militants, unionists, and other political dissidents beheaded most of the leadership of the Dominican left and sent hundreds of people into exile. Under the Balaguer regime, death squads like the Banda Colorá (the Red Gang) launched a killing spree of leftists, students, and journalists.[10] But the repressive tentacles of the state also reached the exile community. In 1971, the murder of Maximiliano Gómez (also known as El Moreno), a leader of the Dominican Popular Movement (MPD) sent chills throughout the Dominican political landscape. Gómez's murder, widely believed to be the work of a CIA agent, took place in Belgium where he lived in exile. Following his murder, another murder, this time a more heinous crime, shocked the Dominican left when a woman's body parts were found in suitcases in Brussels and later identified as Miriam Pinedo, widow of Otto Morales, former general secretary of the MPD killed in 1970 by a police unit in the Dominican Republic.[11]

Concomitantly, sectarianism and splits fractured and further weakened the left for decades to come. One particular event, the Sino-Soviet split, led to leftist infighting as revolutionary organizations quarreled over which organization represented the vanguard revolutionary party and had the correct political line despite the fact that some of these groups lacked any kind of formal structure

and in most cases lacked a basic knowledge and understanding of Marxism.

But it was the hemispheric turn to armed insurrection, spearheaded by the Cuban Revolution and Che Guevara's Foco Theory, that played a major role in splitting the Dominican left into smaller grouplets and sects. The failure of armed struggle, specifically the defeat of the 1973 guerrilla invasion launched from Cuba by former Colonel Caamaño, proved catastrophic in the end. Its defeat not only dealt a serious blow to the idea of overthrowing the bloody Balaguer regime through military force but it was so demoralizing that it led to a spate of accusations and reprimands within a left movement under constant surveillance by both the state and the CIA. Within the Dominican context, the guerilla foco had become an ineffective and useless tactic that ended up prolonging the regime. In a 1975 interview, Rafael (Fafa) Taveras, a leading revolutionary leader at the time who spent five years as a political prisoner argued that "the facts speak so clearly that even the blind can see them: The guerrilla foco is not and will not be viable in the country."[12]

By 1978 the regime suffered a resounding electoral defeat at the hands of the nominally social-democratic Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (Dominican Revolutionary Party, PRD), opening a new political cycle which found the revolutionary left in a new political terrain: a transition period marked by the dominance of reformist politics embodied in both the PRD and the PLD.

While the left continued to persevere in this political climate, it sabotaged itself by undermining its own efforts. For example, in what is considered one of the most important working-class gains of the 1980s, the formation of a workers' party, the Partido de los Trabajadores Dominicanos (Dominican Workers Party, PTD), the sectors of the left involved in its formation ended up capitulating to reformism and joining the ruling PRD as an electoral ally.

However, the PRD abandoned its "revolutionary nationalism," embraced neoliberalism, and followed the advice of the International Monetary Fund to restructure the economy by imposing a structural adjustment program. As a result, in April of 1984, a large segment of the population took to the streets in what became a popular revolt against the high prices of gas and food, putting an end to the social-democratic and progressive image cultivated by the PRD. This event opened the floodgates for the return of Balaguer to power in 1986.

The other hegemonic reformist party, the PLD, which was at the center-left of the political spectrum but by the 1990s also embraced neoliberalism, attracted members of various formations such as the Partido Socialista Popular (People's Socialist Party, PSP), the Comites Revolucionarios Camilo Torres (CORECATOS) and the Partido Socialista (Socialist Party, PS). Interestingly, in this transformation from socialist ideologies to soldiers of neoliberalism, anti-Haitian racism is fundamental, especially for those former revolutionaries who came from petty-bourgeois and middle-class backgrounds like Miguel Cocco, a former leader of CORECATOS, who played a key role in the formation of the xenophobic and anti-Haitian Frente Patriotico (Patriotic Front), an electoral alliance that brought together the PLD with ultra-right politicians like Balaguer and Vincho Castillo, two racist propagandists who served in the Trujillo dictatorship.

As in the heyday of Stalin's Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic under Mao Zedong, sections of the Dominican left looked at repressive, statist, and nationalist political projects as models to emulate in the fight for an anti-capitalist and emancipatory future.

Waiting for the Messiah

In response to the climate of terror under Abinader, sectors of the Dominican left are debating the construction of an electoral left front for the next election period in 2028. Unlike South American countries like Brazil, Argentina, or Ecuador where a left-wing wave brought to power reformist and

progressive governments, the Dominican Republic lacked a strong social movement that could have tilted it to the left.

Since the emergence of the Pink Tide regimes, the old Dominican left has borrowed and, in many cases, copied some of the language and political orientations that emanated from the left turn in the Americas. Instead of marching to the beat of its own drum, the old Dominican left adopts moderation, bringing it closer to reformist, center-left, and progressive currents.

By having abandoned street mobilizations for electoral politics after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Socialist Bloc, some sectors of the old Dominican left have focused their energies on electoral politics instead of organizing workers and peasants and mobilizing the masses in the streets. Adopting this approach meant cultivating an air of "respectability" in order to appeal to moderate and middle-class voters by shedding leftist demands, as in the case of the Force of Revolution (FR), which was once a promising left-regroupment spearheaded in 1996 by the now defunct Partido Comunista Dominicano (Dominican Communist Party, PCD) and several smaller left-wing organizations.

Once again, the old Dominican left is mired in frustration for failing to build a long-lasting electoral alternative. By not prioritizing the political mobilization of workers and popular sectors regardless of their nationality and, in this way, challenging the racist campaigns that have characterized Dominican politics since the late 1990s, this electoral focus has opened the way for the further fragmentation of the working class.

Historically speaking, the Dominican ruling class has played a reactionary role in the Caribbean and Latin America given its subservient relationship to American imperialism. In 1937, the state carried out a genocide against Haitian people and black Dominicans on the Dominican-Haiti border. Consequently, it is important for revolutionaries in the Caribbean region to get a clear understanding of the political situation in this small Caribbean nation and the possibility of building a united front with neighboring Haiti with the aim of fighting mass deportations of Haitians from Dominican soil, imperialist intervention in Haiti, ecological destruction in both countries, as well as supporting popular self-defense against the business elite–backed gangs in Haiti while fighting for civil liberties on both sides of the island.

Building a New Socialist Left

It is evident that it will be extremely difficult for the leaders and organizations of the Dominican Republic's historic left to restore their credibility and prestige as they continue to support pseudosocialist, authoritarian regimes that repress their own people. Further, the old left's undemocratic practices, reformism and nationalism, constitute an obstacle to rebuilding a new left that is internationalist, anti-racist, feminist, working-class, pro-LGBTQ, pro-immigrant, and unabashedly socialist.

It will take some serious struggle and organizing in working-class neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools for the consolidation of a new Dominican left. In that sense, to rebuild an anti-capitalist left that is democratic and non-dogmatic and that will eventually lay the foundation for the formation of a revolutionary socialist party, there has to be a break with the highly centralized, bureaucratic, and top-down leadership party model. Thus, it is imperative that workers, peasants, LGBTQ people, Haitian immigrants, and other popular sectors play a leading role in the socialist movement.

Additionally, radical sectors within the diasporic communities that oppose the Dominican state's reactionary policies can also contribute to building a new left project. It is crucial that this new left reclaim the history of anti-imperialist resistance and at the same time maintain a clear and firm

stance regarding the fight against U.S. imperialism as well as new imperialist powers that are making inroads in the Americas, including China and Russia.

Finally, key to the new left's success will be establishing collaborative relations with Haitian popular organizations that will cement its effectiveness in the fight against local ruling classes and their international backers who exploit and oppress the people who share the island. After the recent approval of the reactionary anti-abortion and pro-boss Penal Code, the left should play a role in the defense of abortion and women's rights as well as LGBTQ people under attack.[13]

Despite the obstacles and difficulties in building a revolutionary left, there are possibilities to building such a movement. For instance, the Movimiento Socialista de Trabajadoras y Trabajadores (Socialist Workers' Movement, MST), which is involved in some of the most important struggles today, is laying the foundations for building a revolutionary socialist movement that is internationalist, anti-racist, feminist, and anti-imperialist.

The current international mobilization in solidarity with the people of Gaza and against the Zionist genocide represents another source of socialist and revolutionary renewal as the Palestinian liberation movement continues to provide political clarity in the fight against genocide, empire, and racism. One such revolutionary organization that has the potential to revitalize the Dominican left is the Movimiento Dominicano en Solidaridad con Palestina (Dominican Solidarity Movement with Palestine), which is aware that the struggle for liberation is intertwined at the local and international level and connects the struggle against the Zionist state of Israel with the struggle against mass deportations of Haitian people, the racist Dominican state, and the far-right.[14]

Notes

1. For background on the authoritarian streak of Chavismo and its continuity in the current regime in Venezuela, see the book by Simón Rodríguez Porras and Miguel Sorans, *Why Did Chavismo Fail? A Balance Sheet from the Left Opposition* (Buenos Aires: CEHUS, 2018); and for the BRICS's inaction on the current Zionist genocide in Gaza, see Eric Toussaint, "Why are the BRICS countries not condemning the ongoing genocide in Gaza?," Aug. 7, 2025; Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt (CADTM).

2. Francis Santana, "Avanza el proceso unitario de las Izquierdas" [The Left Unity Process Moves Forward], *El Desahogo Dominicano*, July 16, 2025.

3. For more on the meeting between old Dominican leftists and the former police chief, see "Izquierdistas se toman un café y hablan con Candelier" [Leftists Drink Coffee and Chat with Candelier], *Diario Libre,* Nov. 29, 2007; and Abel Guzmán Then, "La izquierda se divide ante la intención pacto con Candelier" [The Left is Divided Over the Intention to Make a Pact with Candelier], *Listin Diario,* Nov. 30, 2007.

4. Manuel Salazar, "Insistiendo en la política como punto de partida" [Insisting on Politics as a Starting Point], *Acento*, Sept. 28, 2020. Manuel Salazar, general secretary of the PCT, wrote this article to give a political justification as to why his party backed Abinader's presidential run.

5. Amaury Rodriguez, "Veinte años de barbarie peledeísta" [Twenty Years of PLD Barbarism], *Esendom,* July 3, 2020.

6. "Las quince medidas de Abinader y la maquinaria criminal del Estado dominicano: la continuidad de la represión anti-haitiana" [Abinader's Fifteen Measures and the Criminal Machinery of the Dominican State: The Continuity of Anti-Haitian Repression], April 25, 2025, Socialist Workers

Movement (MST) website. For more on the neofascist violence in the Dominican Republic, see Simón Rodríguez, "Neofascist March Calls for the Expulsion of Haitians in Punta Cana," *NACLA*, April 29, 2025; and Amarilys Estrella, "Dominican Republic's Neofascist Paramilitaries Double Down on Right-Wing Repression," *NACLA*, April 2, 2024.

7. Lilliam Oviedo, "El paramilitarismo, un engendro de la coerción de clase" [Paramilitarism, a Monstrous Creation of Class Coercion], *Rebelión,* March 2, 2025.

8. "A pesar de la represión policial y paramilitar, se realizó la marcha unitaria por los 60 años de la Revolución de Abril" [Despite Police and Paramilitary Repression, the April Revolution 60th Anniversary Unity March Took Place], MST website, April 27, 2025; Lilliam Oviedo, "El paramilitarismo, un engendro de la coerción de clase," April 2, 2025.

9. Amaury Rodríguez, "Washington Ally Back in Power in the Dominican Republic," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 56 (3), 2024, 242–46.

10. "'La Banda' Slays Five More in Santo Domingo," *Intercontinental Press*, Oct. 25, 1971, Vol. 9, No. 37, p. 907.

11. "Dominican Republic: Trujillo's legacy," *Latin American Weekly Report*, March 17, 1972.

12. *Firme*, issue 2, July 1, 1975, p. 3. Rafael (Fafa) Taveras had a long trajectory as a revolutionary fighter: first, as a leading member of the 14 of June Movement; a leading member of the MPD then NCT (a MPD split), and finally, the Bloque Socialista (Socialist Bloc) coalition. After abandoning revolutionary politics, he joined the PRD then its split, the PRM, which is the center-right party currently in power.

13. Amnesty International, "Dominican Republic: New Penal Code Does Not Guarantee the Rights of Women and Girls," Aug. 12, 2025.

14. Sandy Plácido, "For Palestine, from Ayiti," *NACLA*, Dec. 13, 2024.