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Former President Bosch Dies

by LADB Staff

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Dominican Republic former President Juan Bosch died Nov. 1. He was 92. Bosch had been ill for some time with respiratory and other problems. Bosch is considered the most influential Dominican political figure, a presence on the political scene from the 1930s to the mid-1990s. While in exile in Cuba during the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930-1961), Bosch founded the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD) in 1939.

Following Trujillo's assassination in 1961, Bosch became the first democratically elected president in Dominican history, winning by a landslide in 1962. Inaugurated in February 1963, he began a progressive reform program that included land redistribution, nationalization of some businesses, and public-works projects that earned him the reputation in some quarters of being a dangerous radical if not a communist.

His reforms and his refusal to persecute Dominican communists is believed to have cost him US support and eventually the presidency as many in the business community and former Trujillo supporters backed a military coup that overthrew him in September 1963. President Lyndon Johnson dispatched US Marines to intervene in 1965 after a leftist military coup led by Col. Alberto Caamano attempted to put Bosch back in the presidency.

Bosch returned from exile to run for the presidency again in 1966 but was defeated by Joaquin Balaguer, a former Trujillo official who remained in power for the next 12 years. Now 95, Balaguer most recently ran for president in the 2000 election but was defeated by Hipolito Mejia (see NotiCen, 2000-05-25). After a falling-out with PRD secretary general Jose Francisco Pena Gomez, Bosch helped found the Partido de la Liberacion Dominicana (PLD) in 1973. As a PLD candidate, Bosch ran unsuccessfully in the next five presidential elections.

In 1996, he allied with Balaguer to block Pena Gomez and allow PLD candidate Leonel Fernandez to win (see NotiCen, 1998-05-21). President Hipolito Mejia said Bosch was an example of "how one could be a politician and honorable at the same time." The current leader of the PLD, former President Fernandez, said, "Bosch was a true pillar of democracy."

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