

STATINTL

Stemwinder

Those who admire the analytical powers of Senator Fulbright have come to expect penetrating truths from the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that cut through the veneers of cant and illusion. He has done it again with his incisive speech about the American military intervention in the Dominican Republic. What he says about initial over-timidity, later over-reaction and lack of candor throughout is sure to lacerate a lot of feelings. But essentially his point is that with the information available to him President Johnson could have taken no other course.

The pertinent question, of course, is why the advice to the President was so bad. Beyond this the Senator asks several ancillary questions: Why, for example, did the United States veer so far from its general support for Juan Bosch, the elected president ousted by a military coup in 1963, as to oppose his return? Was this part of a more ominous shift against reform movements in Latin America out of fear that the Communists would dominate them? Do we lack confidence in our own ability to influence the course of revolution?

For social revolution, Mr. Fulbright contends, is the course of the future in Latin America, and by seeming to oppose it blindly we only drive those who are dissatisfied with the oligarchical status quo into the arms of the Communists. His characterization of this country's role is acid:

We are not, as we like to claim in Fourth of July speeches, the most truly revolutionary Nation on earth; we are, on the contrary, much closer to being the most unrevolutionary Nation on earth. We are sober and satisfied and comfortable and rich . . .

In another reproach Mr. Fulbright contends that the Administration broke international law and damaged its own reputation in not seeking a collective decision by the Organization of American States before its own unilateral action. His point is well taken, but he might well have addressed himself further to the fundamental need for improved machinery in view of the utter inability of the OAS to reach a decision quickly in emergency.

Happily, the situation in the Dominican Republic now seems to be turning out better than might have been expected from the sorry beginning, and for this recovery the Administration deserves a share of credit. In any effort to derive lessons from the experience, however, Mr. Fulbright's questions deserve some frank answers, not merely anguished screams from wounded policymakers.