



The Dominican Grassroots Movement and the Organized Left, 1978–1986

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ABSTRACT: Through their struggles for better services, grassroots movements played a large role in the process of democratization and construction of social citizenship in the Dominican Republic. The modern grassroots movement, especially in relation to the uprising of April 1984, challenged the government's neoliberal policies and opened the way for the emergence of an independent movement that confronted both left-wing parties and organized labor. However, because the gains from expanding social citizenship remained limited in the face of the Dominican state's inability to formulate socio-economic policies, the movements at best posed a worthwhile goal that Dominican society may revisit in the near future.

Introduction

GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS REMAIN PERTINENT to understanding the course of Latin American history and the democratic process. The revolutionary forces of the 1970s and 1980s thought that these movements could be used as conduits to promote the construction of a socialist society. However, the grassroots movements themselves only sought ways to resolve their social issues within capitalist confines. They were the organized expression of people who live in low-income neighborhoods and who make their living in both the formal and informal economy. They include proletarians,

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semi-proletarians, the unemployed, shopkeepers, peasants evicted from their lands, people who make their living on a day-to-day basis, etc. A clear conflict existed between grassroots movements and petty bourgeois revolutionaries. In some cases, the movements joined to challenge capitalism, and they succeeded in Cuba (1959) and Nicaragua (1979); but elsewhere the story differed and the grassroots suffered defeat (*e.g.*, Brazil, 1964; Chile, 1973). The Latin American grassroots had to struggle within the capitalist system to press their demands for social citizenship rights. The Dominican movement mirrors the larger reality of Latin America as it fought for basic social rights.

This article analyzes the role played by grassroots movements in the Dominican Republic. Focusing on the early stages of the 1980s protest cycle, I argue that in their struggles for better services, grassroots movements contributed to the process of democratization and construction of social citizenship. Challenging the state to recognize social citizenship rights, these movements opened a new chapter in Dominican social history. For their part, the managers of the state and the elite faced serious limitations fulfilling the promises of democracy because of deep-seated social inequalities.

Confronting these challenges, the grassroots movement waged a long struggle to get recognized and, in the process, started to build citizenship rights, demonstrating that social citizenship resulted from struggles between those at the bottom and those at the top. Because the IMF and the United States stripped the Dominican state of its power to formulate socioeconomic policies, the grassroots only achieved limited gains. The maximum achievement was to set a worthwhile goal that Dominican society may revisit someday.

Theoretical Framework

Two sets of literature frame the analysis of the social movement and the construction of social citizenship. The first focuses on how social movements have challenged neoliberal economic policies and promoted democratization (Caetano, *et al.*, 2006; Stahler-Sholk, *et al.*, 2008; López Maya, 1999; López Maya, *et al.*, 2008; Borón and Lechini, 2006; López Maya, *et al.*, 2010; Webber and Carr, 2013). Despite the strong links that the literature finds between social movements and democratization, few have ventured to study social movements and

the development of social citizenship (Dagnino, 2003; Holston, 2008; Merklen, 2005). To overcome this limitation, this article draws on citizenship studies to analyze the contested nature of social citizenship in Latin America. The works of T. H. Marshall (1964), Anthony Giddens (1985), David Held (1989), Engin F. Isin and Bryan S. Turner (2002), and Engin F. Isin (2008) provide the analytical framework.

Marshall suggests that citizenship is comprised of three components: civil, political, and social rights. He noticed considerable overlap between the last two, recognized the inequalities and injustices produced by capitalism and state institutions, but saw the development of citizenship as a process of extension of rights that eventually strengthen society, increasing social solidarity and reducing class conflict.

The civil right became, for the workers, an instrument of raising their social and economic status, that is to say, for establishing the claim that they, as citizens, were entitled to certain social rights. But the normal method of establishing social rights is by the exercise of political power, for social rights imply an absolute right to a certain standard of civilization which is conditional only on the discharge of the general duties of citizenship. (Marshall, 1964, 94.)

Social movements played a fundamental role in exercising influence on political power and gaining rights. Unlike Marshall, who focused on workers' movements in England, this article concentrates on struggles of grassroots movements for social rights such as education, healthcare, housing, and public infrastructure that are at the center of the process of construction of citizenship rights. Unlike worker struggles that operate within the confines of a capitalist enterprise, the grassroots may be outside the factory, but their informal economic operations also take place within the capitalist system. Like workers' movements they make claims on the capitalist state and, as such, contribute to building social citizenship. As Marshall noted, it takes a long time for groups to develop legislation and to exert effective pressure on the state. In order to understand the construction of social citizenship in Latin America, this article builds on Isin's suggestion to focus on processes and relationships that underline the formation and definition of social groups. Concentrating on the social in citizenship means:

(1) These groups are socially constructed; (2) social processes of inclusion and exclusion are at work for each type of right; (3) unequal social relations

are centrally located; (4) we cannot start from the premise that equality requires sameness; and (5) differentiated rights can ameliorate historical inequalities and injustice. A focus on the social in citizenship challenges the notion that citizenship comprises a static and universalistic legal status of abstract individuals in nation-states. To interrogate what is social in citizenship means drawing attention to the process-oriented and contested character of citizenship. (Isin, 2008, 11.)

The making of social citizenship is the product of struggles waged by labor and grassroots movements over a significant period of time; social citizenship acquires the historic characteristics of a particular social formation. At the same time, citizenship remains a source of conflict, as the political regime formally recognizes certain social rights, but the capitalist economic system denies them. Thus, citizens must continuously challenge the ruling power to get their rights recognized even after legislation has been passed.

The development of social citizenship in Europe and Latin America contrasts sharply. In Europe, citizenship emerged in conditions of strong endogenous economic development and diminishing social inequality. Colonialism and imperialist domination enabled Europe to extract resources from the peripheries and create markets for their goods. These conditions allowed some European countries to begin expanding social citizenship rights in the latter third of the 19th century, but most particularly following World War II. The postwar expansion continued until the 1970s, when social citizenship rights began to decline, a reminder that the struggle for social rights is recurrent and dependent on periodic capitalist crises.

In the European case democracy emerged as a political regime that combined two components: a system of rules/actors/institutions and a socioeconomic decision-making system. These two components emerged in a historical context of the rise of industrial capitalism, with a national culture that developed and facilitated identification between representatives and represented.

In contrast, Latin America experienced the legacy of neocolonialism: deep economic inequalities. The system of rules/actors/institutions separated socio-economic decision-making from the political regime because of economic dependence. In addition, ethnic and regional differences and the retarded development of a cohesive national culture in many countries deterred the full development

of the nation–state. The situation became more complicated in the 1980s when

the majority of the governments in the region transferred their capacity to define the orientation of their economic and social policies to multilateral agencies. This capacity, of course, forms part of the sovereignty of states. They sent abroad the management of key instruments for the definition of economic development, the configuration of the productive structure as well as the profile of the social structure and mechanisms for the integration of society. (Franco, 1993, 50–61.)

The effects of this disconnect between democracy and citizenship are obvious — the state loses its capacity to regulate economic and social policies in an autonomous fashion. The role of social citizenship in the reproduction of dependent capitalist societies contrasts with industrial Europe where the state had sufficient resources to expand citizenship. In Latin America, the role of the state is limited, owing to IMF conditionality, and to the role of exterior political and financial forces. In this situation, the role of citizens is to organize themselves collectively and gain autonomy from political parties and the state. They must establish and expand citizenship rights, in part, because they were never really institutionalized in the first place. Grass-roots movements play a crucial role, but their abilities are limited by neoliberal policies, the nature of the state in Latin America, the elites, and vast social inequalities. As a consequence, social protests intensify and, at times, threaten the fabric of society. In any case, demanding bourgeois citizenship rights is revolutionary because the socioeconomic elite and the state are unwilling or unprepared to recognize full-fledged citizenship. What follows is an analysis of how the Dominican grassroots movement exerted political pressure on the state to establish social citizenship rights in the 1980s and set the tone for struggles in subsequent decades.

The Democratic Opening and the New Grassroots Organizations

The elections of 1978 ended the authoritarian regime of Joaquín Balaguer (1966–1978), a legacy of the U. S. military intervention of 1965 that stifled an uprising to restore the democratically elected government of Juan Bosch (1962). Prior to the intervention, two factions

developed within the Dominican armed forces and the United States sided with a group of conservative officers that claimed to fight Communism. The rebels lost and the United States proceeded to organize elections, in which Balaguer handily defeated Bosch. The Balaguer regime blocked the development of the democratic process and inhibited the development of labor and the grassroots movements. However, deteriorating market prices for Dominican export goods in the mid-1970s (sugar, minerals, coffee, and tobacco) starved government revenues and the regime was challenged by a powerful political movement headed by the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), the organization that had led the 1965 uprising. In the process, the PRD abandoned its radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s.

The PRD mounted a significant political opposition to Balaguer in the 1970s and forced him out of office in the elections of 1978. It began a new democratic era that brought fresh opportunities for people in cities and towns. Along with labor leaders, cultural and sports club movement organizers thought that the PRD's rise to power had ended Balaguer's authoritarianism and that democracy had arrived. This made it possible for some club leaders, who had identified themselves with the PRD during the party's opposition to Balaguer, to see collaboration with the new PRD-led government of Silvestre Antonio Guzmán Fernández as natural. From their perspective, no ideological conflict existed; the PRD had been involved in the movement, and now it offered a possibility of integrating them within the state. On the other hand, the Revolutionary Left had also been involved in the movement, but it did not have sufficient resources to carry out activities in urban slums and rural areas.

At the beginning of the 1980s, people living in poor neighborhoods had two options for the construction of social citizenship: to join the Neighborhood Committees promoted by the PRD, or the *Comités de Lucha Popular* (CLPs — Popular Struggle Committees) led by militants from different leftist parties. The PRD was first to propose the idea of Neighborhood Committees. These committees built on the work of cultural and sports clubs that developed in the urban areas following Trujillo's death. The leaders hoped that they would form a unifying link between local governments and communities. While their aim was to neutralize and prevent the formation of independent grassroots organizations, this policy had the potential of laying the foundation for developing institutional mechanisms that

would contribute to the construction of social citizenship. In fact, many of the Neighborhood Committees developed with the support of the PRD made demands on behalf of the communities and stated the need for establishing institutional mechanisms for resolving local public issues.

The Neighborhood Committees recruited many people living in the slums of cities to work on community-based projects. They provided services such as “disposal of solid wastes, upkeep of recreational parks, street signs, tree planting, organizing vigilance to maintain order and combat delinquency, the construction of sports venues and other community activities with the collaboration of the local government and neighborhood self-help groups” (Pérez and Artilés, 1992, 139–140). Up to a point, these Neighborhood Committees continued the work done by the cultural clubs, but now the Neighborhood Committees carried out their activities in coordination with the local government. In her study of grassroots organizations in the 1980s, Tajira Vargas found that in the neighborhoods of Santo Domingo the Neighborhood Committees constituted 33.50% of the total number of community organizations, the cultural clubs 18.70%, and women’s groups 11.67% (Vargas, 1994, 94). This data shows the important push provided by the PRD in the organization of Neighborhood Committees. However, this experiment did not prove successful at the ground level of the poor neighborhoods surrounding the Capital and in the provinces, because the Neighborhood Committees began to be seen as mechanisms controlled by the state, which was attempting to limit the development of independent communities. Moreover, in the middle of an economic crisis, the state itself could not respond to the expectations created by the plan to establish Neighborhood Committees. They soon became government job search mechanisms and victims of the political rivalries among the various tendencies that existed within the PRD. This situation caused many Neighborhood Committees to become independent and to search for their own solutions to the concrete problems in their communities (Matías, 1991, 30). This experience shows that in the 1980s the organization of autonomous Neighborhood Committees contributed significantly to the cohesion of communities in the poor neighborhoods.¹

1 Details and analysis of the neighborhood committees in the provinces are in my not-yet-published manuscript, “En busca de la ciudadanía: movimientos sociales y democratización en la República Dominicana.”

The second option for neighborhoods during the 1980s was a revolutionary solution proposed by Left. The Partido Comunista del Trabajo (PCT — Communist Workers' Party) proposed the creation of the CLPs for the purpose of creating political conditions that would lead to a revolutionary situation such as the one that had produced the uprising of 1965. The CLPs thought the political situation in the Dominican Republic resembled that of elsewhere in Central America, where significant revolutionary processes unfolded (Franco, interview, 2010). The idea for the creation of the CLPs emerged in the midst of a strike by the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Telefónicos (SNTT — National Union of Telephone Workers) during 1982–1983. This union had been in conflict with the Compañía Dominicana de Teléfonos (CODETEL — Dominican Telephone Company). Drawing the attention of the population led to a solidarity campaign. Left militants created the CLPs to strengthen this solidarity and in defense of the workers.

Even though left parties created CLPs, they included members of the cultural clubs, people without any party affiliation. They also included members of Neighborhood Committees and the Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (CEBs — Ecclesiastic Base Communities), small church groups inspired by liberation theology.² Pedro Franco, one of the founders of the first CLPs, states that it was created in an open assembly (Franco, interview, 2010). According to Franco, the CLPs had their origins in a labor conflict. However, other social and political actors continued the groundwork for such organizations to emerge in the North Zone neighborhoods of the city. It is worth noting that the majority of the leaders were leftist militants who did not reside in poor neighborhoods. Most were students from the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo (UASD), the public university. The CLP organizational structure was more elitist and differed from that of the grassroots organizations, which were more flexible. In addition, they assigned slum-dwellers a secondary role in the struggles. According to Fidel Santana, there was no massive participation in the CLPs. "The people would join these organizations because of slogans. These slogans were the point of contact between the activist militants and the community. If the community needed a school, something

2 For a detailed analysis of the CEBs, see my book *The Catholic Church and Power Politics in Latin America: The Dominican Case in Comparative Perspective*.

that moved the people, we would begin creating propaganda based on that demand" (Santana, interview, 2007).

Diverse groups of the left employed CLPs for organizing the poor neighborhoods. Prior to its intervention in the slums, the left was fragmented into multiple political groupings, all of which participated in some way in the construction and development of the CLPs. This fragmentation influenced the operations of CLPs negatively. Nonetheless, all of the groups used the clubs and the Neighborhood Committees to reach out to communities. Víctor Gerónimo tells of the time when he became a member of the Club del Progreso, noticing that there was a discrepancy between the theory and the practice of that club:

The club did not implement any action in favor of and identified with the needs of the people of Ciénaga. As a result, we proposed the foundation of the Movimiento Cultural y Deportivo Club Marcelino Vega, with objectives that matched the needs of the people who lived there. We thought that the word "club" was a foreign term; we did not understand why it was called that. We wanted a cultural movement that would seek progress and facilitate the demands of the community. (Gerónimo, interview, 2007.)

Evidently, Gerónimo's group brought a different ideology that did not fit in with the organization of the members of the local club, and that is why he saw the need to rename and restructure some of the clubs so that they could respond to this new strategy.

The CLPs were a type of vanguard that operated in the name of the residents, and militants risked their lives in clashes with the Police and the National Army. In truth, however, they were organizations created for immediate needs, operated nationwide, but did not have a community base. "The lack of a community base explains why the CLPs privileged general problems over the local and particular ones of the communities" (Matías, 1991, 37). The CLPs had their sights set primarily on a socialist revolution; however, their attention to the demands of the people was their way of approaching the poor neighborhoods. This explains why

these organizations were not successful in creating a structure that would link them either to the population or to its base. Their composition was never broad, nor did it have permanent roots in a territorial or spatial sense. The political parties that guided the CLPs established the goals and objectives of

these organizations. This might explain why there was no coherence in their actions or in their proposals. (Pérez and Artiles, 1992, 101.)

The objectives of most CLPs and the community did not match. In the long term, they did not succeed in laying roots in the community where they conducted their activities. Community residents wanted to build social citizenship by demanding that the state resolve issues related to social services such as school, health, water, construction and repair of streets and roads, while the CLPs wanted to create the conditions for a socialist revolution.

Nevertheless, the CLPs spread throughout the country and, in particular, in the Northeast region of Cibao. Despite their limitations, the CLPs helped to awaken a degree of social and political awareness. They did not foster formation of stable organizations that could promote the development of social citizenship.

The Uprising of April 1984

The uprising of 1984, a watershed in Dominican history, deserves special attention in explaining the political and social consequences of stripping the capacity of the state's socioeconomic decision-making system. Local managers of the state kept insisting that they were defending democracy, but while doing it, they were physically eliminating citizens. The violence unleashed by security forces against insurgents was only comparable to the revolt of 1965, when two factions of the armed forces clashed. The uprising also constituted a turning point in the relationship between the popular sectors and the regime headed by Salvador Jorge Blanco of the PRD (1982–1986). During his electoral campaign, Jorge Blanco had promised to move from political opening to prosperity and many citizens expected that he would deliver. The uprising constituted a wake-up call for the state and the socioeconomic elite regarding the living conditions of a population whose rights as citizens, recognized by the Constitution of the Republic, were actually not respected by a regime that only seemed interested in the implementation of neoliberal policies.

Without the capacity to manage socioeconomic policy, government institutions remained empty-handed and forced to break the promises made to the impoverished neighborhoods of Dominican

cities. Citizens from the lower echelons of society learned a hard lesson: They lacked any protection from the political system that promised them civil, political and social rights. In the meantime, the uprising gave birth to a thriving grassroots movement that began to pressure the government, at least for that moment, to recognize citizenship rights.

Salvador Jorge Blanco realized that if he accepted the conditions that the IMF imposed in order to provide additional loans, social stability would be in danger, because the poorest segments of society would be the most seriously affected. In a letter dated January 2, 1984, and addressed to the President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, the Dominican head of state wrote:

The International Monetary Fund insists on demanding violent adjustments to the exchange system, disproportionate tax increases, excessive restrictions in budgetary financing, accelerated canceling of our external obligations, and a set of objectives for 1984. These objectives will be impossible to achieve, if one takes into account the drop in price in our exportable goods, especially sugar, and the difficulty in obtaining outside resources, due . . . to the international economic slowdown. (*Hoy*, 1984.)

He reminded President Reagan that even the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) made its support programs conditional on his government signing an agreement with the IMF, and he complained that this attitude brought into question the friendship and open collaboration that his administration had with the United States. President Reagan curtly responded:

While we sympathize with your desire to minimize the social and economic hardships associated with the economic adjustment program, we believe that a process of stabilization and adjustment is inevitable. If we delayed the process the difficulties will get worse in the short run. . . . Once an accord has been reached, I can assure you there will be a rapid outlay of assistance funds by the government of the United States. (*Hoy*, 1984.)

Reagan's response made it clear that the Dominican government had no choice but to negotiate with the IMF, and consequently, Jorge Blanco later traveled to Washington to meet with its director, Jacques DeLarosière. Following his return to the Dominican Republic, the President waited until the beginning of Holy Week to address the

nation and explain the results of his trip. He thought that giving his speech while the more well-to-do were vacationing at the nation's beaches and rivers would diminish its impact. But the leader seemed to forget that the residents of poor neighborhoods could not afford to go on vacation. On the evening of Monday, April 17 he announced that the agreement with the IMF would not imply a reduction in the level of public expenditure, nor of the autonomous organs of the state. Besides, there would be no transfer — for the moment — of petroleum and its derivatives to the currency free market. Further negotiations had obtained international financing for import of basic food stuffs, which also would not enter the currency free market. Nevertheless, the leader recognized that

these measures would significantly affect the budget of the Dominican family, and in a particular way, the basic family food basket of social groups with limited incomes. . . . I have arranged that, through the price control mechanisms for consumable goods that the Institute for the Stabilization of Prices (INESPRE) distributes, the final retail price for five food products that make up the national diet be maintained at the current level. (Jorge Blanco, 1984a.)

The transfer to the currency free market of all goods except petroleum, its derivatives, and five basic food products meant that the majority of the population would have to shoulder the increase in prices. In a tour of supermarkets and small establishments in the city of Santo Domingo by journalists from *El Nacional* following the President's speech, they reported unanimous opposition to these measures, because the increases in prices were practically automatic in those establishments that already had goods on their shelves when the increases were announced. The Holy Week truce did not stop incisive commentaries by the residents of poor neighborhoods, and people from the middle classes who could not leave on vacation (*El Nacional*, 1984a).

The impoverished felt most strongly the generalized rise in prices, in both the capital and cities of the interior. These price increases proved overwhelming for slum dwellers residing in the north of Santo Domingo and in the interior. Although unanimity existed regarding the intolerable nature of these increases, during Holy Week people only complained about it, and no collective protest erupted. This did not occur until Monday, April 23 in the northern part of the city, when

youths gathered in assembly and decided to call for a 12-hour work stoppage. They convened residents to protest against the measures announced by President Jorge Blanco. Young people in over a dozen other neighborhoods heeded this call.

Both those who called for the stoppage in Capotillo and the police were surprised by what happened. The police quickly arrived in the neighborhoods and began to arrest as many people as they could, or simply fired on the demonstrators. On the first day of the protests, six people lost their lives, 30 received gunshot wounds, and 300 were arrested (Azcona, Monegro and Peña, 1984). Although the Police Chief, José Félix Hermida González, declared at midday that "everything was under control," Special Operations agents were deployed in the neighborhoods. These forces had been trained by the MAAG (Military Assistance Advisory Group from the United States) to handle urban and rural counterinsurgency (CEDEE, 1984, 8–9).

News about events taking place in the capital's neighborhoods spread throughout the country and protests erupted in different parts of cities in the interior. Police detained demonstrators in several places in the Cibao and in one locale demonstrators sacked and set fire to an INESPRES grocery store. Protests also broke out in the northeast. In the city of Santiago the multitude sacked and set fire to the local headquarters of the PRD. Similar events took place in dozens of slums and burning tires blocked roads. Interestingly, all the areas affected by the uprising represented the most impoverished in that particular locale. In the south, police reported destruction of various commercial establishments and the arrest of more than 40 people. Looting, clashes with the police, and arrests occurred throughout the Cibao.

On the second day of disturbances, the national death toll reached 44, along with more than 150 victims of gunshot wounds. The police admitted to 35 deaths in two days of disturbances, indicating the grave magnitude of these incidents (*El Nacional*, April 25, 1984; *Última Hora*, April 25, 1984). The authorities also acknowledged that they had detained hundreds, but that many had nothing to do with the outbreaks, being only spectators. They were subsequently freed.

On April 25, the third day of disturbances, protests continued in neighborhoods of the capital and various interior cities. The police and Secret Service agents shot at least one man at close range without any exchange of words. A woman who ran a street concession received several gunshot wounds and later died. By the end of the uprising

estimates varied on the number of casualties. Huchi Lora, a recognized journalist, reported that according to the Dominican Commission on Human Rights, 70 identifiable dead existed, along with 50 more still not officially identified. Lora reported that 157 people had been wounded and 4,358 arrested (CEDEE, 1984, 7–13, González, 1984; Peña, 1984; Lora, 1984).

The magnitude of the uprising caused President Jorge Blanco to address the nation on the night of April 25. Surrounded by the top brass of the Armed Forces, a way of showing viewers that he had the support of the military, the President conveniently forgot the words he used to address U. S. President Reagan when he claimed that a relative monetary stability characterized the country and that “a sharp rise in the inflation rate undoubtedly would provoke such strong social tensions that they would disrupt the peace and the democratic process.” He stated that the leftist political opposition and the Reformist Party had fomented the violence and that the burning of PRD headquarters, arson in the sugar fields to damage the economy, and obstruction of highway, roads and bridges impeding traffic demonstrated this. The President declared that

these incidents are among the most violent recorded in the democratic period of the country since 1961. Alongside this, we must recognize the intervention of our Armed Forces and of the National Police. Faced with the aggressions against citizens and against themselves, they defended public and private property and restrained their reactions with reasonable prudence. . . . This speaker will not hesitate or vacillate at any time to continue assuming all the responsibilities that the exercise of power imposes. Those who hold the hope of twisting the course of our history deceive themselves. (Jorge Blanco, 1984b.)

Jorge Blanco’s speech was not well received by much of the population, and this editorial in *El Nuevo Diario* seemed to reflect this sentiment:

It is necessary to condemn the anarchy that shook the capital and the important major cities of the country. . . . They foolishly destroyed local public vehicles and looted or burned private establishments, especially small and mid-sized businesses. But the response on the part of the forces of public order is absolutely unacceptable. Their intention was to kill citizens, many of whom were innocent, shooting indiscriminately in order to kill, as was demonstrated by the number of people who lost their lives, estimated to be

around fifty, the majority of whom were shot in the head or thorax, with some 200 suffering gunshot wounds. (*El Nuevo Diario*, 1984.)

Press reports indicate that humble inhabitants not involved in the uprising comprised a majority of fatalities. In fact, the fact that the only member of the armed force shot was accidentally fired up by another soldier shows irrefutably that the demonstrators were unarmed; that no exchange of gunfire occurred, but rather a massacre of ordinary people.

The Uprising, As Seen by Dominican Sociologists at the Time

The uprising expressed a general crisis in Dominican society, and various sociologists have provided interpretations. Wilfredo Lozano (1997, 262) proposed that the social explosions were “an expression of the breakdown of populist hegemony over the urban masses.” Laura Faxas notes this idea and proposes that the uprising represented the crisis of the national–popular myth that the PRD had created in the country since 1962. When the democratic transition took place in 1978, and a leader of the PRD assumed the administration of the state, the myth began to break down and definitively collapsed during the uprising of April 1984. This happened because, while in power, PRD administrations did not fulfill the promises made during the repressive years of the Balaguer regime (Faxas, 2007, 18). Faxas correctly points to a profound crisis in the populism of the PRD. The party continued to maintain its populist discourse, but its actions at the head of the National Executive branch and its relationship with the dominant socioeconomic elite changed forever. The popular national project had come to an end because the PRD had opted for becoming integrated into the mainstream of state and society. The PRD leadership appeared to be unaware that a democracy stripped of its socioeconomic decision-making system could not respond to the needs of citizens.

For his part, Carlos Dore Cabral proposed that, contrary to what was commonly thought at that time, the uprising did not occur throughout the capital or in all the cities in the interior, but rather in the most impoverished neighborhoods. In a study of the newspapers *El Nacional* and *Listín Diario*, Dore Cabral looked for articles related to the uprising between April and September of 1984 in Santo Domingo.

He found that “the 93 areas with population that the ONE (National Office of Statistics) recognizes, 67, that is, 72% of the total, do not appear in the newspapers that were studied, and only 26, that is, 28% of the total, are found in articles from those six months.” That indicates that the protagonists of the “insurrection without arms” of April 1984

were residents of the marginalized neighborhoods which are located in the surroundings of Santo Domingo. In the most important mass demonstrations that have taken place in the country following the revolution of April 1965, the petty bourgeoisie . . . did not participate in their organization or leadership. One should look for the explanation of this fact in the disconnect that exists between these actions and the established political forces. (Dore Cabral, 1985a, 19–26.)

This finding has great significance for understanding the grassroots movement following the April uprising. It explains why the parties and political movements of the left, right, and center could not see what followed. The members of these organizations did not live in those neighborhoods, and consequently, they failed to grasp how profoundly the Government’s economic measures would affect those neighborhoods (Dore Cabral, 1985b, 13–15). Although Dore Cabral’s reflections are limited to the capital, a study of eight newspapers by this author leads to the conclusion that the same thing happened in many of the cities of the interior.

What We Learn from the Uprising in Retrospect

The uprising of April 1984 did not contribute directly to the construction of social citizenship, but it revealed the social consequences of the transference of the socioeconomic decision-making system to the IMF. The revolt showed that the managers of the state and the socioeconomic elite faced serious limitations in attempting to fulfill the promises of a democratic society while implementing IMF-style economic policies. They also confronted national structural constraints posed by widespread social inequality and the authoritarian political culture that permeates all political constituencies. The rebellion exposed the inability of established political parties to bring about social change. The PRD strategy of bringing cohesion to society through the development of Neighborhood Committees that linked local governments to communities did not work, because of shifting

political strategy and scarce resources. As with other mainstream political parties, the PRD applied a clientelistic system to recruit activists into the party rather than strengthening local institutions and social citizenship. In addition, labor leaders, who had functioned as the vanguard of the grassroots movement, were surprised by the uprising. They tried to lead it by calling for a nationwide strike against the IMF-inspired policies, but nobody listened to the call. This demonstrated that labor leaders no longer had much influence in the neighborhoods when the uprising occurred. Militants of the left had been working in Santo Domingo's slums, but they had not been able to consolidate their presence and were overtaken by the events. As for the grassroots organizations, they were fragile and unable to build alliances with groups or individuals situated in high places.

By revealing existing high levels of misery and poverty, the uprising contributed to raising the consciousness of some sectors of the petty bourgeoisie regarding citizens' rights. In particular, it caused many young, petty bourgeois professionals to become involved with social struggles. A good number of these young people began to work in neighborhood organizations such as the Committee for the Defense of Neighborhood Rights (COPADEBA), and Alternative City, an NGO that emerged to technically support the social work of COPADEBA in the neighborhoods in the north zone of Santo Domingo. Others joined, as we shall see below: the Council of Popular Unity (CUP), the Committees for Popular Struggle (CLPs), and parties on the left.

The emergence of the CUP and the CLPs illuminate how the uprising contributed to raising the level of consciousness among the politically active members of society. These organizations were able to develop a strong protest movement, which culminated with a nationwide strike in February 1985. The strike's success sparked the development of a grassroots movement independent of parties on the right, the center-left or the state. Interestingly, this new movement also remained independent of labor, which until then had spearheaded the grassroots movement.

*The Council of Popular Unity, the CLPs,
and the Grassroots Movement*

The CUP emerged as one of the strongest neighborhood organizations after April 1984. It arose out of debates that took place on

the left regarding what route they should take in order to achieve a socialist revolution. The great dilemma for the CUP was whether it should follow the lead of the “Revolutionary Left,” which believed that the revolution was “imminent,” or whether it should integrate with the work of the organization of the neighborhood residents. At that time, the left promoted a penetration of cultural and sports clubs in the neighborhoods in order to incorporate them into its strategy of socialist revolution. On the other hand, the announced goal of the CUP was to develop an autonomous grassroots movement in which activists from all political parties could participate. The first CUP core groups were created on May 19 in the east zone, and on June 3 in the north zone of Santo Domingo. Later on, core groups emerged in the south region and in Cibao, particularly in the northeast. Given that the CUP’s core groups wanted to be pluralist and attract people of different political affiliations, from the beginning, they denounced the slogan of “imminent revolution” and proposed to head the protest movement then developing throughout the country. Following the tradition of cultural and sports clubs, and even of the Ecclesiastic Base Communities, the leaders of the CUP proved genuinely interested in incorporating young people from marginalized neighborhoods into the cultural organizations. They wanted to instill environmental values in them, and above all, get them involved in the movement against urban removal projects that were beginning to occur in the north and east zones at the end of the 1980s. In spite of these efforts, only in September 1984 did the CUP begin to be known as an emerging organization that united diverse CLPs in the impoverished slums of Santo Domingo. By February 1985, the CUP maintained that it united 60 popular organizations, and based on this representativeness, it presented itself as one of the organizations with greatest presence in Santo Domingo (Jiménez, 1985; Alvarez, interview, 2007; Franco, interview, 2010).

The Strike of February 1985

The CUP, the Dominican Leftist Front along with more than 30 CLPs and popular organizations of diverse political–ideological orientation, developed a strategy of staggered work stoppages that culminated in the declaration of a national strike on February 11, 1985. Among the demands of these stoppages was a call for the government

to break with the IMF, revoke the price increases, establish a minimum salary of 350 pesos per month and eight pesos per day in the rural zones, a readjustment of 25% for those making 600, 30% for those making 800 and 10% for those making 1000. In addition, they demanded agricultural reform, the nationalization of foreign enterprises, cessation of political repression, and that INESPRES should supply the small- and medium-sized retailers (*Última Hora*, 1985). The staggered work stoppages began in early September, in both Santo Domingo and the interior. The fact that no violence occurred during the stoppages shows that the new strategy of the CLPs worked. They demanded the government respect civil, political, and social rights of citizens, which are enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic. They proclaimed the strike peaceful and rejected violence.

In early April the press reported several stoppages in the slums of Santo Domingo and cities of the interior (Taveras, 1985; Azcona, 1985a; 1985b). Even though the government deployed a large number of National Police patrols during the two weeks of the stoppages, only sporadic confrontations occurred with demonstrators. This was in stark contrast with the government stance during the uprising of April 1984. Nevertheless, the police harassed the neighborhood leaders (especially those known to have ties with the left).

The government did everything possible to shut down the strike on February 11, and when that failed, attempted to limit its scope at the national level. The President even took the lead by offering to lower prices on basic goods a couple of days before the strike, to see if that would halt its impetus. However, the strike organizers were not impressed and reiterated their demands, despite lack of support from labor unions (Bujosa Mieses, 1985).

A variety of newspaper reports indicates that the general strike was a total success for its organizers. Significantly the strike proved peaceful in nature and incidents between the strikers and the police remained limited to a few neighborhoods in the city. In the principal cities of Cibao, in the north, the entire population embraced it. The same thing occurred in the east (Mora; Bujosa Mieses, 1985). Even Don Rafael Herrera, editor of the conservative *Listín Diario*, recognized the strike's success. In his judgment, "the strike was a success for its organizers. We sincerely deplore it. The strike was peaceful. We sincerely celebrate it" (cited in Lora, 1985). This recognition meant that the state and dominant socioeconomic elites had to take notice:

a social movement was developing not under the control of the dominant parties, and this could have dangerous implications for social stability. The state was losing control of the demonstrations, much to their chagrin, and consequently, they needed to take measures so that these movements would return to the fold.

The Jorge Blanco administration understood that it had to act in order to calm the situation of social and political tension. The President decreed concrete measures to ensure that the processing plant of INESPRES would produce low-priced milk. It readjusted electric bills and emitted a decree exempting sardines, codfish, and herring from import taxes (López Reyes, 1985; Olivo, 1985). These announcements revealed the success of the strike.

The staggered work stoppages and the general strike of February 11 showed that the grassroots organizations could act without being managed from union headquarters. A new type of social movement was beginning to form that demanded autonomy with regard to the traditional political parties. The CUP and the CLPs appeared as the new subjects of change, and exhibited their capacity to conduct a strike without violence. The peaceful strike resulted in fewer demonstrators being detained, despite substantial law enforcement patrols and random arrests. On this occasion, the protests coincided with the desires of the slum dwellers, who did not want violence in their neighborhoods, and partly because of that, the work stoppages had greater support in the urban slums and in rural communities. This led the CUP and the CLPs to want to continue with the strategy of staggered work stoppages at the local and national levels in order to obtain certain concessions.

Social tensions continued throughout 1985 and work stoppages occurred in different neighborhoods of the capital and the provinces. During the course of the year, the CUP and the CLPs grew significantly, and had high visibility in the press. Their leaders, Pedro Franco and José Pichardo, had become well-known figures, because they frequently called press conferences and publicized schedules of CUP activities, where they maintained their critiques of government policies. Through its actions, the CUP established the basis for initiating the formation of an autonomous grassroots movement that would fight toward the construction of social citizenship. By means of staggered work stoppages, they raised the consciousness of neighborhood residents regarding the possibility of getting the authorities to respond

to some of their needs by means of protests, marches, and confrontations with law enforcement groups. Nevertheless, these organizations still needed to have a greater presence in the slums. The CUP had this in mind, but the majority on the left remained interested in the socialist revolution and not in constructing local institutions like the Neighborhood Committees that were organically tied to the city halls. The construction of strong organizations in the slums proved to be the left's great challenge in the mid-1980s and beyond.

The protest cycle of the 1980s continued until 1992, when a series of international and national events forced a precipitous decline of social movement activities. On the international scale, the Gulf War in the Middle East (August 1990) forced an increase in oil prices and social movement actors could not blame the government for it. The IMF successfully "persuaded" the government to deepen neoliberal economic reforms, which led to privatization of most state-owned assets, leading to layoffs, and weakening labor. While the government succeeded in implementing neoliberalism and creating macroeconomic stability, the grassroots movement suffered political fragmentation and lost steam. In the meantime, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) emerged as a new social sector in the 1990s with full support from private and government foundations in Europe and the United States. This, of course, further offset the type of activities grassroots organization had in the slums. Contrary to grassroots organizations, NGOs provided, on a limited scale, needed services in rural and urban communities and preached subordinated integration into society rather than contentious actions.

The actions of NGOs coincided with neoliberal globalization, which was producing a cultural shift whereby individualism, consumerism, and a desire to get rich quickly using illicit means replaced solidarity. Petty bourgeois intellectuals and leftist militants who used to support the grassroots and labor movements took positions in government, the private sector or migrated abroad. The decline of the grassroots movement put claims for social citizenship rights on the back burner, while government, NGOs, and mainstream political parties used clientelistic mechanisms to coopt those with social movement experience.

In closing, it is worth noting that since 2009 new petty bourgeois movements, unconnected to the grassroots, have emerged. The environmental and the 4% movement for education stand out.

The environmental movement began in March 2009 when peasants from the community of Gonzalo, in Monte Plata, near the capital, protested that the government had issued a permit to Grupo Estrella, an important local firm, to construct a cement plant three kilometers away from Los Haitises National Park. The issue caused a national uproar. President Leonel Fernández (2008–2012) had to ask the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to conduct a feasibility study. This study confirmed the accusations and the permit had to be withdrawn. Similarly, environmentalist protests forced President Danilo Medina (who took office in 2012) to ask the UNDP for another feasibility study concerning a permit to Xtrata Nickel-Glencore to exploit gold in Loma Miranda. Again, the UNDP study confirmed local allegations about environmental damage and the government had to withdraw the mining permit. However, it warned that if an adequate technology to exploit the mine becomes available, the government should re-visit the issue. In the meantime, the environmentalists enlisted the support of the Catholic Church and got Congress to pass a law in August 2014 declaring Loma Miranda a National Park. However, in September President Medina vetoed the law, arguing that it was unconstitutional and violated a series of international conventions. Pressure from the business community that supports foreign investments combined with political in-fighting between Medina and Leonel Fernández might explain the veto. Medina wants re-election and this conflicts with Fernández's interest to run in the 1916 presidential elections. In the meantime, the environmental movement has suffered a setback.

The 4% Movement for Education emerged after four years of denunciations and protests about implementing the General Law of Education of 1997, which mandated 4% of the Gross National Product (GNP) for pre-university education. After four years of intense mobilizations and protests, the 4% movement succeeded in getting President Medina to implement the General Law of Education. Since 1912, Medina has ordered the initiation of a nationwide school construction program. He has also ordered the establishment of public school programs from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. to replace the old system that held classes in the morning and afternoon with different groups of students. It is too early to evaluate this initiative, but Medina has embarked on an unprecedented program to improve school facilities, hire new teachers, and provide free lunches to students.

These two petty bourgeois movements have revived social movements and the process of construction of citizenship rights. Unlike the grassroots, which always presented multiple demands associated with social citizenship, these movements are single-issue oriented and, so far, have not ventured onto other concerns. This experience shows that the strategy of building alliances with groups in high places and using the media and symbols to carry their message has worked. As such, they have brought back the issue of social citizenship to national attention.

Conclusion

This article builds on the sociological literature that credits social movements for their contribution to the construction of social citizenship. Going beyond citizenship theories, it seeks to understand the linkages between social movements and the construction of social citizenship. The findings here reveal the inability of the state and elites to implement neoliberal economic policies and simultaneously to advance the social democratic process. Likewise, they show the inability of the political parties to serve as vehicle of social change. The strategy of the PRD to develop Neighborhood Committees and sports clubs to bring cohesion to society and develop social citizenship failed because of its shifting strategy and scarce resources. Similarly, the political parties of the left failed to coordinate their efforts with those of the residents of the neighborhoods and were caught off guard during the uprising of 1984.

Despite great struggles of resistance in the 1980s, the gains of the Dominican grassroots movement were limited. Perhaps, the maximum achievement was to pose a worthwhile goal that may be revisited by Dominican society in the near future. A lesson to be learned is that labor, grassroots, and petty bourgeois movements will have to establish stronger organizations to wage their demands for citizenship rights and unite around basic demands. This is just the beginning of the story: building social citizenship takes a long time; it is a process of advances and setbacks. The gradual decline of labor and grassroots movements since the 1990s has impacted social citizenship negatively. Nevertheless, new petty bourgeois movements emerged after 2009, and they have adopted some of the demands of the grassroots and labor movements. However, it remains to be seen whether the scattered

and uncoordinated local protests of the grassroots movement will absorb this lesson and develop into a full-fledged movement that can deepen social citizenship.

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