

CARIBBEAN

G&W big screen tie with Dominicans

By Bob Gottlieb
and Barbara Zheutlin

If they had taken more production stills of William Friedkin's \$20-million production of *Sorcerer*, a Paramount/Universal remake of the old French classic *Wages of Fear*, you might have been able to see in the background of one of them a group of uniformed men standing around, some carrying submachine guns, all of them armed. They would not be members of the cast or crew. They would be members of the Dominican Republic's armed forces, sent in by the government to keep the peace and make sure the natives remain friendly, or at least subdued.

At the head of command of the 30 or so troops was Colonel Trifilio Estevez from the Army and Major Frank Alba from the Air Force. They were emissaries from the government of President Joaquin Balaguer, who is a close friend and ally of Charles Bluhdorn, chairman of the board of Gulf and Western, the corporate parent of Paramount Pictures.

United Fruit of the '70s.

The Gulf and Western/Bluhdorn/Balaguer relationship dates back to 1967 when Gulf and Western purchased the South Puerto Rico Sugar Company, a major sugar producer which owned nearly 300,000 acres in the Dominican Republic at La Romana. Bluhdorn was particularly concerned with the dangers—as Gulf and Western perceived them—of social revolution in the country, and he undertook the purchase of South Puerto Rico Sugar knowing that Lyndon Johnson would likely intervene if trouble developed. Bluhdorn brought in a team of Cuban exiles, headed by former Batista strongman Teobaldo Rosell, to break the back of the local sugar union at Romana, replace it with Gulf and Western's own company union, and provide overall supervision of the plantation.

The Gulf and Western chairman immediately developed close ties with Dominican President Joaquin Balaguer who had come into power after the 1965 American invasion. Satisfactory arrangements were made concerning the conditions for reinvestment of profits made in the Dominican Republic as well as opening up of the country for further foreign commercial and industrial penetration.

Gulf and Western used its massive profits from La Romana to construct a large-scale tourist complex of hotels, resorts, and luxury estates complete with golf courses, tennis courts, and their own jet strips. It also organized an "industrial free zone in Santo Domingo": a place for foreign companies to set up plants with extremely favorable tax breaks.

Gulf and Western actively promoted the industrial free zone, encouraging U.S. companies to set up plants, and bringing several of its own subsidiaries such as Consolidated Cigar into the zone. Gulf and Western manages the zone, and boasts of the zone's attractive supply of low-cost, non-union labor.

Gulf and Western's penetration into the Dominican economy, politics, and culture has become extremely widespread. It is the largest foreign employer (and the largest U.S. employer in Latin America). Aside from sugar, it has interests in cattle, cement and motion pictures. It organized a local film production company, Cinema Dominicana, and its partially owned foreign distribution outlet, Cinema International Corporation, has an office in Santo Domingo.

When Gulf and Western began to expand into financing through the partial acquisition of a private investment bank that in turn began to penetrate other locally-owned Dominican companies through loans and equity participation, enormous opposition emerged, forcing Gulf and Western to divest some of its interest. By 1977, Gulf and Western had become the embodiment of Yankee dominance—the "United Fruit of the '70s," as one Gulf and Western observer remarked.



Gulf and Western is very big in the Dominican Republic, and chair Bluhdorn is very close to dictator Balaguer. *Sorcerer* fell into his hands... Bluhdorn knew where to shoot it.

Polo and yachts.

While Gulf and Western became the Island's number one foreign investor, Dominican President Balaguer tightened his control over the country. The trade union movement was effectively dismantled and the opposition parties hindered at every turn. "Change seems inevitable," the head of the Senate's Foreign Relations committee staff said back in 1971, "and it is likely to be more radical—and possibly more violent—for having been postponed." But Balaguer holds on, consolidating his power with increasing U.S. aid, foreign investments, a beefed up military, and disruption of any oppositional movements.

Bluhdorn is personally committed not just to Gulf and Western's presence on the Island and support for Balaguer, but he is constantly on the lookout for ways to boost his company investment and the Dominican regime's stability. He frequently spends weekends at his Dominican home and often brings out Gulf and Western executives (including Paramount officials) to luxuriate in the surroundings.

One Paramount official, President Michael Eisner, was astounded by what he saw on his first trip out. "It's wonderfully lavish," Eisner comments. "Why, they play polo and they have yachts and boats and it's unbelievable. I was shocked, because the Dominican Republic...well, I thought; it's certainly not like Martinique or Jamaica—all those islands that sound like the big time—but the Dominican Republic. It's absolutely superb. I was shocked. And Charlie Bluhdorn loves it because he built this thing from scratch."

One of the ways that Bluhdorn felt he could help his Dominican Republic relations was by using the Dominican Republic as a location for Paramount productions. When Universal Pictures decided to unload *Sorcerer* because the Friedkin production began jumping in costs, Bluhdorn saw a major opportunity to combine

his Dominican needs with a possible "hot" film property. Bluhdorn offered to go in 50/50 on costs under the rubric of the Paramount/Universal foreign distribution company, Cinema International Corporation, if Friedkin and Universal looked into the Dominican Republic as a location for several crucial sequences.

Armed soldiers.

The terms were worked out and Dominican sites were located. Shooting in the Dominican Republic began in May 1976 and lasted into December. There were numerous difficulties and tensions that permeated the production such as the famous bridge sequence where, despite local assurances, a hoped-for rainfall to help create torrential waters never materialized. The locations were all based in the countryside, but occasionally cast and crew would make their way into Santo Domingo to stay at the Gulf and Western-owned hotel.

Though some of the crew found conditions pleasant and agreeable and admired the enormous Gulf and Western influence, others were disheartened by the scenes around them. "When there's such poverty around you," one Friedkin assistant recalls, "it's incredibly depressing... It's a police state, a dictatorship. Every time you turned around all you'd see was armed soldiers. That in itself was frightening."

All the *Sorcerer* personnel were impressed with the Gulf and Western clout. "If there were ever any problems," one production man explains, "we'd just call New York." Why? "Well, because what I know of Gulf and Western, it's their island."

The Dominican government was always quick to help. It provided from 20 to 30 armed soldiers with two high-ranking officers every day that the *Sorcerer* group stayed in the Dominican Republic. Payments were made by Gulf and Western, both for food and upkeep for

the soldiers and to a township or community whenever the company entered a particular location. ("We would use their houses and do other things that were generally disruptive, so we'd make donations to make the whole thing more palatable," says one crew member.)

And indeed, the peace was kept. "When the townspeople saw the uniform," states the same crew members, "they knew it was the government." Still, there were signs—beyond the visible poverty—of unease. Because of the hard-to-get-to locations the company frequently used helicopters to get from place to place. But after 7 pm or so all helicopter use had to cease because of an island-wide curfew. Further, whenever *El Presidente* was in the air flying in his plane or helicopter, the *Sorcerer* copter was grounded, as were all other planes on the island. In other words, nothing flew—and therefore nothing presumably could launch an attack—while Balaguer was in the air.

Havana of the '70s.

Despite the numerous location problems and internal difficulties, Bluhdorn and Gulf and Western clearly were pleased with the film's use of the island. Gulf and Western's local cinema company, Cinema Dominicana, was extensively utilized. American dollars poured into the island. Despite some feelings amongst the crew about a police state atmosphere, others strongly defended Gulf and Western on the island. "Whenever there's a big brother, there's a certain resentment," comments a Friedkin assistant. "Yes, we heard of dissension, but it's a developing country and Gulf and Western after all plows back its money into development. There will always be discontents. To criticize is one thing; to improve is another."

The *Sorcerer* experiment with Dominican locations for Paramount is neither the first nor will it be the last attempt by Gulf and Western to proselytize for their

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GREAT BRITAIN

Firemen's strike puts torch to Labour wage limit

The Civil Defense has been sent in to help. But though trained to cope with nuclear war, they've had no luck fighting fires.

By Mervyn Jones
LONDON—The strike by British firemen that began Nov. 14 is the first major showdown between the unions and a government determined to limit all wage increases to a 10 percent ceiling. The Fire Brigades Union is a strong organization maintaining a solid union shop, but has never called an all-out national strike in its 50 year history. The decision to take strike action, reached at a delegate conference, indicates the strong resentment of men doing a skilled and dangerous job for a meager wage.

Firemen's pay was for many years pegged to parity with that of the police, but in the past decade this tradition has been abandoned; thanks to high-pressure lobbying, the police have been able to push ahead. A fully trained fireman with five years' service now earns 65 pounds (\$120) a week before tax, a notch below average industrial earnings. Many groups, such as bus drivers, are better paid. The working week is 48 hours before payment of overtime (for most workers it is 40 or 42). The FBU is now demanding a 30 percent raise. The employers—strictly speaking the local authorities, in effect the government—refuse to grant more than 10 percent.

Can't find fire hydrants.

When the strike became inevitable, the government decided to mobilize Civil Defense fire-fighting equipment manned by troops. Though supposed in theory to cope with nuclear war, the CD force has turned out to be utterly inadequate for the ordinary run of fires. The engines, produced in 1950 and mothballed ever since, have no modern equipment—for instance, they use only water and not foam—and press pictures remind us of old-style fire-fighting as depicted in children's books. The soldiers are unfamiliar with city streets and often can't find the hydrants. Where a fire would normally attract three modern engines arriving within five minutes, it now burns for 20 minutes before one antiquated engine is on the scene.

Some sections of the press have launched attacks on the firemen, described as heartless and irresponsible, which reach a new low in bias. They are waiting, it seems clear, for a death that can be clearly ascribed to the strike.

Happily, as I write, no such death has occurred. Union leaders have wisely allowed members to use their own initiative in emergencies. On several occasions strikers have quit the picket lines to help the soldiers where life was in danger, notably in helping to rescue patients in a hospital blaze. But the Army teams are on their own when only property is at stake.

So far the most destructive fire has been in a large modern power station, starting in a cable duct in the turbine hall. Local firemen say that they could have killed the fire in an hour. It defeated the CD equipment and burned for two days; the power station will be out of action for at least a year and the repair cost will be immense. Other fires in factories and warehouses have similarly got out of con-

trol and the total loss of property runs into millions of pounds. The despair in insurance offices is easy to imagine.

Tempers have so far remained cool, the firemen feeling nothing but sympathy for the unfortunate soldiers. There are signs, however, of anger at some alleged underhand tricks. At one London station, firemen who had left the picket line to rescue a girl trapped in an elevator returned to find items of modern equipment removed from the station.

Astonished by support.

Tory spokesmen and Tory newspapers are demanding that the troops should be empowered to enter the fire stations, by force if necessary, and bring out the modern engines. Home Secretary Merlyn Rees, the man responsible for government strategy, has refused this demand on the grounds that it would exacerbate the dispute. He is also advised that such action would be pointless, since sophisticated equipment can be used only by fully-trained professionals. The Tories, however, have an obvious political need to find something to say other than simply backing the government.

FBU men have been genuinely astonished by the sympathy they are receiving from the public. It seems that many ordinary people have suddenly recognized the debt they owe to men whom they normally take for granted. Fire stations are adorned with large banners—"NERO REES FIDDLES WHILE LONDON BURNS" is typical—and passing motorists are urged to toot their horns in token of support. The tooting in some places is continuous.

At Euston fire station, near my London home, pickets are collecting signatures to a petition urging acceptance of the wage demand. Signatures, mainly from office workers who pass the station, are coming in at the rate of 1,000 a day. Collection boxes at this one station have been filled with 800 pounds (\$1,440) for the strike fund in the first week. Similar news comes in from other cities, including a rather piquant incident in Cardiff, where a prostitute walked in with a bottle of whisky for the firemen, remarking that her nightly earnings exceeded their weekly wage.

Government unyielding.

Though the strike is solid, except in some rural areas where regular firemen are outnumbered by part-timers who are not FBU members, the government remains unyielding. As Rees and Callaghan see things, their entire wage policy is being tested. Certainly, if the firemen win anything like a 30 percent increase, it will be hard to resist similar demands—notably from the miners. The unofficial strike by power station workers has ended, but the leader of the electricians' union has let it be known that there will be militant action—in his words, "an awful bloody battle"—unless adequate raises are secured when the current contract runs out.

It must be remembered that the TUC now endorses no part of government wage policy, except the pledge of a 12 month interval between demands. The 10 percent ceiling is a unilateral government policy buttressed neither by the force of legal compulsion nor by TUC endorsement. Yet for Callaghan everything depends on enforcing the ceiling—the confidence of foreign investors and the IMF, and also the alliance with the liberals which is keeping the government in office. Political leaders who have repeatedly stated that there can be no exceptions naturally find themselves with no room for maneuver. *Mervyn Jones writes for the New Statesman.*



Striking firemen picket outside London fire station Nov. 14.

CP opts for pluralism

The Congress of the British Communist party, held on Nov. 12-14, has predictably resulted in endorsement of the "Euro-communist" policy urged by the leaders. Quotation marks are in order because these leaders sedulously avoid the label, stating that mere coincidence accounts for their adoption of a line of thinking that parallels that of Berlinguer and Carrillo.

Hard-line delegates from some branches put up numerous amendments to the party's policy document—the newly revised version of *The British Road to Socialism*. The key vote was on a proposal to delete the pledge that a Communist government would resign office if defeated in a subsequent election. The issue may

well be called unreal in a country whose CP isn't within hailing distance of electing a single member of Parliament, but it was taken as the litmus test of belief in pluralistic democracy.

The amendment was defeated by 300 votes to 66. Victory for the leadership was never in doubt, since the majority of hard-liners (known in CP circles as "tankies" from their support of Russian tank invasions) had earlier quit the party to gather in the so-called New Communist party. Taking this into account, the minority vote at the Congress was surprisingly large and reveals the reluctance with which Britain's Communists have come round to the new ideas.

—Mervyn Jones

G&W and Dominicans

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island. Bluhdorn tried and failed to get Paramount's production of *Islands in the Stream* to film in the Dominican Republic. He also initiated the idea of filming the Miss Universe contest last July (which took place in Santo Domingo) for possible use in a later production. (The Miss Universe pageant could provide benefits for Gulf and Western in more ways than one. Gulf and Western subsidiary clothing manufacturer Kayser-Roth owns all the rights to the Miss Universe contest and receives payments from each host country. Kayser-Roth also has a plant in the Dominican Republic.)

Perhaps the most fitting Gulf and Western/Dominican/Paramount collab-

oration was *Godfather II*. A key scene in the film is set in the last dying days of Batista's Havana, with the glitter of the casinos, the tourism, the mob, the armed soldiers, and the plush decadence that characterized the city prior to Castro's rise to power. Present-day Santo Domingo was in fact a "natural setting" for that scene; as the travel writer for the *San Francisco Chronicle* declared: Santo Domingo is "perhaps on its way to becoming a replacement for once gay Havana." With the troops on the streets, the casinos in full swing, the dominant foreign company in a cozy relationship with the government, the film's image and reality blend. For Gulf and Western that reality means extraordinary profits and a lush island of their own. ■

German lawyer

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politics, but more profoundly, to the ideology of the famous Trilateral Commission." (The 1975 report to the Trilateral Commission on *The Crisis of Democracy* recommended more authoritarian government in the Western democracies, and in particular, measures to curb "value-oriented intellectuals" who carp about injustice and abuses of power.)

Admiral Antoine Sanguinetti, who objects to the American-imposed substitution of "security" doctrine for national defense, expressed indignation against "the violation of right of asylum in my country" and concern over "the rise in Europe of a phenomenon of South Americanization."

As if to confirm the Admiral's fears,

President Giscard's personal envoy, former Interior Minister Michel Poniatowski, last month visited Argentina where, in an interview with the newspaper *La Nacion*, he declared that: "The first condition for human rights as well as for freedom and progress is the uprooting of terrorism to which we are all subjected; that is the *sine qua non*. Terrorism is a state of war in which all States are in solidarity..."

Whether called "Germanization" or "Americanization," Western Europe is suddenly faced with the development of a process in which political issues and conflict are shoved aside to make way for a "war on terrorism" that is self-perpetuating because it breeds the very evil it claims to combat. ■