

Bosch is in limbo . . . and it's unfair

THE DOCTOR is propped up on his elbow on the hospital bed. His brown eyes seem hollowed deep in his gaunt face. There is a frequent twitch in his left eye. His white hair is tousled into a shock, standing almost straight up.

He is wearing a gray sweatsuit, but he can run nowhere. His life this day is circumscribed by this one, almost bare room: Just a bed, a chair, a stainless steel toilet and wash basin combined into one.

Orlando Bosch, M.D., is not well. He is 63, and his ailments, beginning with his stomach, go back two decades.

We met last weekend in the well-guarded clinic area of the Metropolitan Correctional Center. That's what our Federal Government calls its prison in South Dade. Orlando Bosch is the second-best-known prisoner there; No. 1, Panama's Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, came more recently.

Upon arrival at the prison, my colleague Roberto Suarez and I are told that this will be a "social visit." There is, in fact, nothing "social" about the visit. I had wanted to interview Dr. Bosch, and that is exactly the arrangement I made weeks beforehand with the warden's office. Nevertheless, once there we are told that we have just two choices: Accept the ground rules. Or leave. So my pen, my notebook are checked in a locker. We go through a metal detector, then through heavy prison doors whose electronic slide is controlled elsewhere. For every moment of our two hours there, we are never outside the gaze of guards.

As we meet, Orlando Bosch is within hours of completing his week-long hunger strike. His fast is to protest living these past two years in the unceasing frustrations of uncertainty.

Orlando Bosch is no saint. But I have read nothing that suggests he is pretending to be one. You don't have to search far in Miami to find people who are sure that he is a terrorist; you don't have to search far in Miami to find people who are sure that he is a patriot. Possibly, at one point or another in his life, Orlando Bosch has been both.

In 1968, this anti-Castro militant went to prison for four years for firing a recoilless rifle at a Polish freighter docked in Miami; it was dented. It was his only conviction. Two years out of prison, he left this country, thereby jumping parole. Two years still later, he was jailed in Venezuela as a suspect in the 1976 bombing of a

Cuban airliner in which 73 lives were lost. Dr. Bosch spent 11 years in prison, was twice tried and twice acquitted. The Venezuelans let him out of prison in early 1988, and he headed back to the United States. Here he was jailed for three months for the parole violation. That sentence was completed two years ago last month, yet he is still imprisoned.

How could that be in America?

The U.S. Government says that it hasn't been able to find any country willing to take him. (No doubt, Cuba would take him — and execute him. No one I know suggests that.) There are others who argue that our Government finds it more politically convenient to do nothing, letting him rot in jail until death.

We left Dr. Bosch's hospital bed in a mid-afternoon's driving thunderstorm and drove, quickly, to the first place we could find to write down what he told us during our discussion.

He felt betrayed by Castro

The portrait that Orlando Bosch painted was of a person who went to the University of Havana with Fidel Castro, who believed in him during the tumultuous days in Cuba of the Fifties. A man who subsequently felt betrayed by his friend, the student revolutionary and future Cuban president. Because he felt betrayed and because he had encouraged others earlier to support Fidel Castro, Orlando Bosch says that he felt "obligated" to help rid Cuba of him.

Was he involved in violence? Surely then, he says, and with help from many in Cuba and in this country. That included, he says, people at the highest levels of the United States Government. "You have to put yourself in the early Sixties," he said, "what was happening then. It was a war."

The Bay of Pigs disaster occurred in April 1961. Even past that, Orlando Bosch and compatriots "made another plan" with U.S. authorities. That plan was approved, he says. He and others were trained for renewed efforts to topple Fidel Castro.

Without warning, he says, that plan was called off. That terrible disappointment was compounded by not knowing why. Unsurprisingly, Orlando Bosch seems convinced that the reason is linked to an event that occurred not long afterward: The Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. For days Americans held their breaths and thought of bomb shelters and their families' lives while President Kennedy faced off with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. The latter blinked. It was, though, not quite the total U.S. victory that we thought at the time. In exchange for the pullout of Soviet nuclear-missile capability from Cuba, the United States, we discov-



**DAVID
LAWRENCE
JR.**
PUBLISHER



Adriana and Orlando Bosch

... When the future seemed bright

ered years later, agreed that it wouldn't support any invasion attempts of the island.

Today, Orlando Bosch can call John F. Kennedy "a great man," then add: "But he made mistakes . . . like me."

"Are you a terrorist?" Orlando Bosch is asked.

"I am not a violent man," he insists. He calls violence "incompatible" with his life's dream and vocation, of being a pediatrician and saving lives.

He frames his answers by talking of how times have changed. He recalls two decades ago as a time of struggle in and outside Cuba, a struggle actively aided by the U.S. Government. More-recent years, he says, have not been "the time for that sort of war."

But what about Castro? Would Dr. Bosch assassinate the Cuban president if he had the chance?

He seems to struggle for the answer, then allows, "Yes, but I would call it justice." His response seems more philosophical than threatening.

The revolutionary days of Orlando Bosch seem

behind him. I am as subject as the next person to being taken in, but he does not seem a violent man today. There remains the passion for a democratic Cuba, but that passion seems quiet.

Dr. Bosch wants to avoid jeopardizing an already-fragile situation. He goes out of his way to praise the guards, noting that all treat him decently and some show him a special respect.

He reads a lot, particularly newspapers. He watches almost no TV and doesn't "much like radio either." When he is in his regular cell, he paints up to four hours a day. His paintbrush mostly is used for works that show a Cuba of his memory and dreams.

Is he optimistic about being able to return to his wife, Adriana, and his children? "I do not permit myself to be optimistic," he says. In more than 15 years of prison, he has gotten his hopes up too often.

Will his homeland be free again?

The answer is an unhesitating yes. But when? "I am not one of those who think it might happen in days or weeks or months," he says. "It might be four or three or two years. I just don't know."

'This country gave my people a chance'

Late in our conversation, he breaks down and cries. This touching, awkward moment, seeming so genuine, follows an almost innocuous question about what his feelings are for the United States. "I love this country," he says. No other country "gave my people such a chance." He is sobbing now, reaching for a washcloth to dry his eyes. He apologizes, saying that the hunger strike has put his emotions close to the surface.

How can we know all the truths of Orlando Bosch's past or, for sure, what is fair today?

What I do know is that Orlando Bosch has spent a quarter of his life in prison for what he believed in. What I do know is that he is a sickly man and old beyond his years.

What I do believe is that Orlando Bosch is entitled to his case being resolved . . . now. Under U.S. Supreme Court rulings, I am told, excludable aliens — his category — don't have the Constitutional rights that you and I have; by that reasoning, Orlando Bosch's indefinite detention is perfectly legal.

What I do know is that indefinite detention is not the American way of justice. We are a fair people.

It is damnably unfair to let Orlando Bosch simply waste away.

David Lawrence