

ACTION

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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A-886

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HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State

INFO: Amconsul SANTIAGO DE LOS CABALLEROS

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GENERAL

By the end of the week the heavy rains which began on Monday in the northern part of the country reportedly claimed at least 11 lives (with others missing), left hundreds more homeless, and caused an as yet undetermined amount of damage to crops.

Other headlines this week went to President Balaguer who announced that the impediment to the return of ex-General Elias WESSIN Y WESSIN would be lifted on January 10 (Item 1). On December 12 the President gave a nation-wide radio and television address which for the most part was devoted to a detailed accounting of the government's use of U.S. economic assistance (Item 2).

In other news this week (1) speculation and tensions arising from the Bosch resignation issue continued (Item 4); (2) the Dominican Navy withdrew from the drydock facilities owned by U.S. citizen Felix BENITEZ Rexach after the frigate Mella had been repaired (Item 3); (3) lack of the necessary quorum prevented the Chamber of Deputies from acting on President Balaguer's veto of a law permitting the installation of slot machines in authorized gambling

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GROUP 3

FORM 4-62 DS-323

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establishments (the Senate earlier rejected the veto); (4) Santo Domingo Mayor Guarionex LLUBERES announced to counter rumors to the contrary that there would be no change in the terms of the agreement on pay with ex-workers of the Ayuntamiento and that payments would begin as scheduled on December 20; (5) after a new outbreak of violence in which five students were detained, classes resumed at mid-week at the liceo Unión Panamericana where students had declared a strike last week in protest against "diversified education" and in support of striking students in San Juan de la Maguana whose strike reportedly continued at week's end; (6) responding to reporters' questions, President Balaguer indicated that diversified education would be instituted only in areas where there was a high population density and where the students themselves "voluntarily" requested such a system and said the Secretary of Education had "his ideas, but has not given them to me yet"; (7) the executive committee of the PRSC denied new reports published in Listín that the party had all but decided on Hector GARCIA GODOY and former UASD rector Julio César CASTAÑOS Espaillet as its 1970 presidential ticket; (8) the MPD's clandestine revolutionary command "Miguel Fortuna" claimed responsibility for the death by shooting of Jose Antonio JIMENEZ (Balá) who was described by the press as a notorious Trujillo thug ("palero"); and finally (9) the President in his nationwide speech countered charges that there was an "absence of authority" in the government. (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE)

1. President Lifts Ban on Wessin Return

President Balaguer, in the course of a nationwide radio and television broadcast on December 12, announced that the impediment barring ex-General Elias Wessin y Wessin from the country would be lifted on January 10 (the President had stated earlier in the week that the General could return "before January 10"). The delay, the President said in his speech, was due to the desire that "this liberal measure embrace all leaders who participated on one or the other side in the unfortunate events of April 1965". The President said he hoped that the decision would become known to ex-Colonel Caamaño and other military figures involved in the civil war and that those who desired would return "to participate as political leaders" in the 1970 presidential elections.

Meanwhile a memorial mass for Wessin's brother-in-law Manuel Enrique CHAVEZ was held December 7 in the Cathedral. There were no incidents. Also this week by a vote of 25-22 the Chamber of Deputies authorized the imprisonment of Deputy Miguel RUIZ Lama, who is accused of murdering Chavez. The judge designated by the Supreme Court to handle the case requested the action by the Chamber. Some deputies argued that the action was unconstitutional because of Ruiz' parliamentary immunity. (UNCLASSIFIED)

COMMENT: Wessin's return will introduce a new dimension into the Dominican political picture and will probably raise political temperatures; but it will accomplish what he and the PQD have been seeking for some time, the union of the two on home ground and the opportunities that this affords with respect to the party's attempt to create a viable base for 1970, including the opportunity for direct relationships between Wessin and other political groups. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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2. Balaguer Speaks to Nation

As he promised when commenting on the Ambassador's speech to the American Chamber of Commerce several weeks ago (see A-864, A-880), President Balaguer this week devoted the major portion of a nationwide radio and television address to a detailed accounting of how the nation had utilized the foreign assistance received from the U.S. since he became President. The President said that the figures he cited demonstrated that the criticism leveled at the government for spending the greater part of its funds on sumptuous projects at the expense of agricultural development was groundless. The President thanked President Johnson by name for the "effective help" the D.R. has received during the past two years and called Ambassador Crimmins an "enthusiastic collaborator" of the GODR in the area of foreign assistance.

The President also used the occasion of his speech to announce that since the government could not give a regalia pascual to public employees this year, he had signed a decree authorizing the Banco de Reservas to issue loans of up to one month's salary for those earning RD\$100 or less and up to 50 percent of a month's salary for those earning from RD\$101 to RD\$400 monthly. Interest of one percent per month will be charged and repayment which must be completed in 10 months will be deducted from salaries beginning in January. The President continued to hold out the slim hope of a "gratis" bonus provided the government's revenues would permit this. (UNCLASSIFIED)

3. Shipyard and Drydock Facilities Returned to Benitez

The press this week gave considerable coverage to the Dominican Navy's temporary assumption of control of the shipyard and drydock facilities belonging to U.S. citizen Felix Benitez Rexach. (SD-4434, SD-4474). At first Benitez interpreted as a threat the final statement issued by the Navy in which it reserved the right to use the facilities again in similar circumstances and refused to accept them. Later, however, he decided to accept return of the property in order not to jeopardize his case for complete settlement of the problem. At his mid-week press conference the President reaffirmed the government's claim that it is a shareholder in the corporation (which was never organized) stating that the state is "co-owner, in a certain sense" of the shipyard. The claim is based on the fact that the facility is located on government land which Benitez contracted to exploit.

Meanwhile Director of Immigration Estrada Medina told the press that he had received many denunciations concerning Benitez's activities which led him to consider Benitez a conspirator and said he had warned Benitez on several occasions about meddling in Dominican politics, threatening deportation if he persisted. Benitez has denied the accusations which President Balaguer defined as "gossip". The President discounted the conspiracy charges and said Estrada Medina's statements were not authorized. (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE).

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The party's week was a relatively quiet one (the delegation to Spain has not yet returned) and what action there was appeared divided between continued speculation and tensions arising from the Bosch resignation issue, and problems concerning alleged police repression.

From Spain came two telegrams -- one from José VEGA Imbert and the other from PEÑA Gómez, Antonio GUZMAN and Ambiorix DIAZ -- emphatically denying last week's AP story that Vega had stated Bosch would return to the DR with an eye toward the 1970 elections (see WPR #38). Senator CASIMIRO Castro answered party critics of the letter sent by him and other pro-electionists asking Peña Gómez' speedy return (see WPR #38) by terming their reactions unjustified, defending any PRD leader's right to write to any other PRDer anywhere, and denying that he and the other signers had given any thought to other political movements. The "radicals" reply appeared to come at midweek, when Organization Secretary "Rafa" GAMUNDI used the party radio program for a spirited defense of Bosch's anti-electoral position and "Popular Dictatorship", and to ask PRDers to follow the lead of Acting Secretary General (and leading "radical") Jottin CURY until the return of Peña Gómez.

Alleged police repression against PRD youth in Pedernales gave rise to an exchange of correspondence between Casimiro Castro and the Police Chief, Brig. Gen. Braulio ALVAREZ. Casimiro saw a rise in the crimes of "uncontrollable forces" under "Colonel" Alvarez' administration; the latter replied to "Deputy" Casimiro that these had been provoked by "uncontrollable turbas" fomented by "agitators" (presumably of the Casimiro stripe). Meanwhile, as though ignoring Casimiro's protests the National Police kept up the pressure by detaining eight PRDers in Santiago and arresting the Press and Propaganda Secretary of Santo Domingo's Zone K. (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE)

COMMENT: Indications are that Secretary General PEÑA Gómez will stay on in Europe temporarily despite Casimiro's call. It is known that he plans to visit Stockholm and perhaps other European capitals, and will probably remain out of the DR for another few weeks. However, details of the "Benidorm Accords" will most likely be released by the other members of the PRD commission upon their return from Spain -- which at week's end was expected at any time. (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE)

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