

Latin Letter

All change at top of Brazilian army

Brazil: President Ernesto Geisel's latest army promotions have brought a group known in 1964 as 'the hard-line colonels' to the top of the military ladder. Their task will be to complete the withdrawal of the army from the political arena.

The new army chief of staff, General Samuel Alves Correa, recently stated that the army was more important than politics, and suggested that a tactical retreat was called for if honour was to be preserved. Geisel's promotions contained no names likely to raise the army's sagging morale, but it is unlikely that the high command will dispute power with the presidential palace.

The only special effort made by Geisel was for the commander of the second army corps in São Paulo, General Dilermando Gomes, who

was due to retire. A general at the Supremo Tribunal Militar was persuaded to retire early to create a vacancy which will prolong Dilermando's career. An indicator of military morale was the irritation expressed by many officers in the second army at the praise lavished upon Dilermando in his numerous farewell ceremonies for 'ending human rights violations in São Paulo'.

No such effort was made for the retiring chief of staff, General Ariel Pacca da Fonseca, who leaves active service along with Generals Teófilo Gaspar de Oliveira and Aírton Pereira Tourinho. General Pacca da Fonseca is highly esteemed throughout the army as the only man capable of uniting the military around a professional ideal. His replacement by General Alves Correa was curious, as

the latter was commanding the third army corps in Rio Grande do Sul, which is a more prestigious post.

The new third army commander, General Antonio Bandeira, is typical of the hardline colonels with a long history of brutality. He inherits an army corps, however, which has been deprived of its traditional scope for conspiracy. His ambition was in fact to head the fourth army corps in the north-east, which is his home.

The new second army commander is General José Fragomeni. He has little history of political involvement, though he has always surrounded himself with a group of officers known for their extreme right-wing views. The probable reason for his appointment is his knowledge of the São Paulo army corps, where he served from 1975 to 1977.

General Hugo Abreu should, according to seniority, have been placed near the top of the list presented to President Geisel for promotions to four-star general, but he was not even included. The formal pretext was his disciplinary arrest in the heat of the struggle between the presidential nominee, General João Baptista Figueiredo, and the dissident candidate, General Euler Bentes Monteiro (LAPR XII, 39). In practice, that chapter is closed, and most of Abreu's followers are seeking some sort of accommodation with the new order.

No decision has yet been announced about the next army minister. A cascade of leaks from Brasília has refuted the most popular bet, that it would be General Walter Pires de Albuquerque, who is a very close friend of Figueiredo. Walter Pires is well known for his dislike of General Golbery de Couto e Silva, the head of Geisel's civilian household and one of Figueiredo's closest advisers. □

The Brazilian army high command

Army minister: Fernando Belfort Bethlem

Chief of Staff: Samuel Alves Correa

Commander I army: José Pinto de Araújo Rabello

Commander II army: José Fragomeni

Commander III army: Antonio Bandeira

Commander IV army: Argus Lima

Department heads: Walter Pires de Albuquerque

José Ferraz da Rocha

Rui de Paulo Couto

Ernani Airosa

Antonio Carlos de Andrade Serpa

Commander Planalto (Brasília): Heitor Luiz Gonzaga de Almeida*

Commander Amazon: Rosalvo Eduardo Jansen*

* no voting rights

Luis Guagnini

It is almost exactly a year since Luis Guagnini, correspondent of this newsletter and of *El País* (Madrid), was detained by the Argentine authorities. We have learned through unofficial sources that he is being held by the Argentine army, but the Argentine government has publicly denied any knowledge of his whereabouts and has not responded to representations made on his behalf.

We were advised, again unofficially, that the intervention of friends and readers of this newsletter did have an important impact and helped keep Guagnini alive. In Britain, his case has been taken up by the National Union of Journalists and by members of parliament. The most recent development is that he has been granted a visa to enter Britain should he be released by the Argentine authorities. This is an important development, as the British embassy in Buenos Aires will now take official steps to discover the circumstances of Guagnini's continuing detention and the alleged reasons for it.

We would again ask our readers to take up the case of Luis Guagnini (LAPR XII, 1 & 11) with the Argentine government, and also with human rights organisations and Amnesty groups in their own countries. The Argentine government should be asked to recognise officially that it is holding him, and to say what charges it has against him and when he will be tried; if there are no charges he should be released immediately.

Guagnini is not, of course, the only journalist to have been silenced by the Argentine military government. Argentina holds the world record for repression of journalists, with 89 recorded cases of journalists in prison or 'disappeared' after detention.

Brazil comes second, with 22 such cases, followed by Chile (19), Uruguay (17), Paraguay (5), Cuba (5), Guatemala (2), Haiti (2) and Venezuela (1). Latin America accounts for half the total of 162 cases; the rest come from Europe, Asia and Africa. The list has been compiled from the records of the American Pen Center, Amnesty International and the International League for Human Rights.

It has been recorded on a plaque which was unveiled at the headquarters of the Overseas Press Club of America in New York on the thirtieth anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights. □

By the way

Peru: The prime minister, General Oscar Molina Pallochía, gained some first-hand experience of the serious increase in crime in Lima when, just before Christmas, he went shopping in the city centre. Accompanied by a top police officer, General Molina was stepping out of his official car when a motor cycle drew up; the rider snatched the general's watch off his wrist, and accelerated away into the traffic. The police officer was also relieved of his watch. According to newspaper reports, the minister's watch was worth about us\$1,200. He was apparently dressed in a stylish, light-coloured suit and dark glasses, and must have been mistaken by the *escapero* for a wealthy foreign tourist. □

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