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We Kidnap

Anti-Communist General Wessin y Wessin

By HAROLD LORD VARNEY* in *American Opinion*, November, 1965

In brutally expelling anti-Communist General Elias Wessin y Wessin from the Dominican Republic, President Johnson's representatives seemed almost as if they were trying to make the United States look like a nation of fools.

Every rational instinct of American policymakers should have cried to them that the anti-Communist General Wessin would be vitally needed in Santo Domingo during the coming months of almost certain Communist efforts to solidify their capture of the Dominican Republic. Instead, they have exiled him. They have done so with a clumsiness and an unnecessary cruelty which has few precedents in our time.

Why have President Johnson's appointees done this senseless thing?

The only apparent answer is that the American team in Santo Domingo is now passively reconciled to the inevitability of a Communist takeover on the island. If we are to judge by the Wessin outrage, they are now even willing to openly support the Communists. This, notwithstanding President Johnson's declaration of May second that our troops were sent to the Dominican Republic to save it from becoming another Cuba. In the last five months, while our troops were ordered to stand at their posts like frozen statues—permitted to do nothing to wipe out the Communist rebels—our President's policy has turned full circle. Yes, it is a terrible fact. Our government is now acting in full support of the Dominican Communists.

It is silly to argue, as the State Department is doing, that General Wessin's expulsion was the only way to make the Communists surrender their arms. The Communists *haven't* surrendered their arms. We gullibly kept our part of the bargain and sacrificed Wessin; and then the Communists did what they always do—they violated their end of the agreement. The net of the situation is that we have lost our strongest Dominican friend, while Colonel Francisco Caamano Deno's Communist activists have scattered, with their guns, throughout the country—preparing for the next uprising.

Where is the American image now? Under our present quaking leadership, we stand before the world as a nation too incompetent to defeat even a Juan Bosch. In the Dominican Republic, our Latin American policy has touched nadir.

I

It is never a pleasant experience for an American to distrust

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his official representatives abroad. When our representatives err, our natural reaction is to look for extenuating circumstances. In an action as heavy-handed and repulsive as the kidnapping and expulsion of Wessin, shame compelled us to look for the saving explanation. I therefore visited General Wessin y Wessin in his refuge in Miami because *American Opinion* was anxious to get his story of what actually happened in the Dominican Republic.

I had never met the General. I had long known of him as the gifted young man, of Lebanese parentage, whose sheer talents had lifted him to a key position in the Dominican Armed Forces. He had risen to the command of the Armed Forces Training Centre at the San Isidro Base. Behind him, through every vicissitude of Dominican politics, stood the loyal force at San Isidro, comprising perhaps 2,000 carefully chosen troops.

In 1963, outraged by Juan Bosch's Communist manoeuvres, Wessin had been the spearhead of the military coup which had expelled Bosch from the Presidency. Although Wessin was in control of events, he sought only to free his country from the tyranny of Communism. He therefore supported other men for the new Junta government which followed Bosch's departure, and then he returned to San Isidro—to resume his modest post. Throughout the period of Junta rule (September 1963, to April of 1965) he pursued his course as the anti-Communist conscience of the Army. He came to be trusted implicitly by genuine anti-Communists in the Dominican Republic as the man who would never permit the Communists to take their country.

It was fortunate for the United States that there was such a man in San Isidro on April twenty-fourth when the Bosch-Communists, with the help of a few corrupted mutineers in the Army, suddenly seized Santo Domingo. The unexpected audacity of this move caught the unpopular government of the Reid Cabral Junta flat-footed.

Within forty-eight hours, Donald J. Reid Cabral had given up and the Communists, with Bosch's old understudy Jose Rafael Molina-Urena as Provisional President, had taken over the National Palace. Here, where Trujillo's will was once law, Communist voices shouted into the T.V. cameras and microphones, "Viva the new Socialist Republic! Viva Fidel Castro!" Throughout the capital, high Army officers were losing their nerve and making overtures to the rebels. Important officers who proved recalcitrant were terrorised by the announcement over the National Palace radio and T.V. of the addresses of

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Militant Churchmen

I recently saw some old film on the television in which the English were training in Salisbury and the "Springboks", as the grateful commentator called them, were preparing to help us oppose Mussolini in North Africa. Since then, we are waging economic war against our one friend on the African continent, Rhodesia, while most of the other nations are pressing us to start fighting.

One would have expected, in such a tragic situation, that the ministers of the Gospel of Peace, and particularly a Church that recently announced its policy as "Reconciliation", would have made every effort to restore harmony and sanity. But with honourable exceptions this has been far from the case. Lord Fisher of Lambeth commended forceful measures and the Student Christian Movement's Executive Committee announced that "it welcomes the sending of British troops to Zambia and concludes, 'however reluctantly' that force will be necessary if lawful government is to be resumed in Rhodesia." (*Church Times*, Dec. 10, 1965).

The *New Christian* (Dec. 2, 1965) gives out a more muted note than recently, saying that Britain will be responsible for establishing "a new political and social order" assuming that it is possible "for the Smith regime to be overthrown without the intervention of the United Nations." We have often been accused of disturbing the culture of the tribal system, but this paper accuses the Rhodesian Front Government of "a vicious racial policy", presumably because the tribes have been preserved and the dignity of the Chiefs maintained. According to Judge Gerald Sparrow, "This system of Government through chiefs has been one of the major successes" in that country.

The periodical also accuses the present regime of a "deliberate denial of educational opportunities to Africans" and commends a "group of teachers and research workers in the university of Ghana" who are willing to be seconded to Rhodesia. I should not have thought that that enlightened country had much to teach Rhodesia in the way of representative government.

But two questions emerge of great significance. The first is the reservation that Africans—in this new political and social

order—must have learned to "vote responsibly". This suggests that others, in the glorious one man one vote campaign, and in the other new nations, have not so learned. It is indeed an admission of the truth in Mr. Smith's retort that one man one vote is little use when there is only one candidate, and in his insistence on a responsible vote.

The other problem is what to do with the Whites, who, when all is said and done, have created modern Rhodesia. They prove an embarrassment to the theorists, and the *New Christian* editorial suggests that they should be "assured of a rightful place in the life of the country if they choose to stay," while there is much to be said for the suggestion that those who "decide to emigrate to another Commonwealth country" should be given financial assistance. One might have added that they should be assured of a welcome in Tanzania, but perhaps that is no longer a Commonwealth country.

About half a million Africans have found their way into Rhodesia from other countries—it is apparently insulting to call them "natives" or to address them as "boy", a correspondent asserts, and the French had better find another term for waiter (*garçon*)—so on the face of it, Rhodesia is a better place for them to live than several other countries. But our sanctions are disturbing all this, and the Whites have little enough encouragement to negotiate. The nauseating hypocrisy of honouring their pensions after all for "humanitarian considerations" can hardly have escaped them. Nevertheless conciliation will have to start sooner or later, and one asks those who are making it so difficult whether they really desire a massacre first (they would call it a "sharp lesson") so that the way can be cleared for a holy war against South Africa. A civilised man would suggest conciliation first.

—H.S.

Rhodesia

The *Guardian*, December 28, 1965, reports on a letter written by a German Doctor, living in Salisbury, to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* to correct the impression, which he says is given by the world's press, with few exceptions, that the white minority in Rhodesia wished to hold the Africans in eternal slavery and blocked every move towards political and economic progress.

For 50 years, he said, the Rhodesian Government had tried to raise African living standards and to awaken interest among the Africans in modern agricultural methods. "Up to now, the success of these efforts has been very disappointing. These people accept advice politely, but forget all about it very quickly either through laziness or because of an ultra-conservative attitude, and act upon the advice only in the most rare cases.

"During the last 15 years, I've sat on various committees or worked in Government departments where again and again we've puzzled our brains so that we could interest these people in their own development. So long as the Government did the work everything was fine, but as soon as the blacks were given responsibility the project quickly collapsed."

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WE KIDNAP

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their wives and children—with instructions to the Communist mobs to seize them as hostages.

When Wessin y Wessin looked for allies to help him oppose the Communists (who were already celebrating their victory) he found that his brother officers had turned into jelly fish. One of these men was the Chief-of-Staff of the Air Force, Brigadier General Juan de Los Santos-Cespedes. When Wessin urged him to order the planes at his command to strafe the rebels out of the Palace and thus demoralise them, Los Santos made excuses. Wessin "persuaded" him by sending two officers with submachine guns to his office. At the point of their guns, General Los Santos agreed to join Wessin and to bomb the Palace. He even placed his special Air Force troops under Wessin's command at San Isidro. Within a few hours the situation had changed and the Reds had abandoned the Palace. By defeating the rebels at the Duarte Bridge over the Ozama River, Wessin had the Communists on the run. But he still didn't have enough troops to completely sweep the rebels from Santo Domingo. It was at this juncture that President Johnson was asked for help—which he granted on April twenty-eighth. The assumption was that the American Marines and paratroopers in unity with the Wessin troops, would speedily clear the Communists from the city and destroy their resistance.

But Wessin had not reckoned on the Janus-faced contradictions of a "Concensus" Washington. When President Johnson sent American soldiers to Santo Domingo, he also sent as his personal Envoy one John Bartlow Martin, friend of Communist Juan Bosch. The President even conferred with Communist Romulo Betancourt in Washington. The outcome of this facing-both-ways approach was predictable. Before the Communists had been beaten, or even broken up as a cohesive force, Envoy Martin ordered the cessation of the attack. As General Wessin later pointed out, it was this American betrayal which lost the war against the Communists.

Behind the cease-fire was no less important a Communist than Juan Bosch himself. Rebel Colonel Francisco Caamano Deno, commanding the Communist forces, realised that his game was up if the Americans, backed by Wessin, attacked him. He sent a desperate appeal to Bosch in Puerto Rico. At that moment Monsignor Emanuele Clarizio, the Papal Nuncio, was in Puerto Rico. Bosch made a tearful appeal to the Nuncio—in the name of peace and the end of bloodshed—to go to Santo Domingo and demand a cease-fire. Monsignor Clarizio was won over. He hastened to the Dominican Republic, enlisted the help of the pliable Jose Antonio Mora (Secretary General of the Organisation of American States), and with Martin behind him he reduced all opposition to a truce. Despite Wessin's misgivings, the other Dominican army officers accepted the cease-fire.

Martin, flushed by his first victory, now determined to get rid of Wessin. With Mora and Monsignor Clarizio scurrying back and forth between the rebels and the new Martin-backed Junta under Antonio Imbert Barreras, Communist Colonel Caamano announced that he might end the rebellion if General Wessin and several other officers whom he named were broken from their commands. At Martin's insistence, U.S. Ambassador W. Tapley Bennett now requested that Wessin resign. When he did not consent after a second visit by Bennett, the U.S. Embassy sent a false statement to the Press saying that Wessin had quit. It was headlined in the *New York Times*. In the face of this pressure, General Wessin stood knee-deep in Pigmies

but adamant. He remained in his strategic post in San Isidro.

The Johnson Envoys, both Martin and his successors, decided that what could not be won by direct demand could be won by harassment. When the American forces broke their corridor through the city, thus separating Caamano's rebel enclave from the anti-Communist Dominican forces of General Wessin, the American commanders conspicuously turned their guns to face Wessin's troops. The corridor soon became *an American-patrolled zone to protect the Communists*.

Vainly, General Wessin pleaded for American permission to attack and thus destroy the overrated Caamano rebels. In my talk with him in Miami, he assured me that the military effectiveness of the rebel force was so low after the cutting through of the corridor that his troops—even without American help—could have cleaned out the Communist sector in a two-hour operation. Despite the fact that the only justification for American presence on the island was the elimination of the Communists, President Johnson's representatives coldly refused to allow Wessin to attack.

To make certain that Wessin was immobilised, Lieutenant General Bruce Palmer Jr., the commander of the American forces, mounted an American gun to command the position of every tank in Wessin's base, and even forced the removal of loaded bombs from Wessin's planes. So strict was the American beleaguement, General Wessin told me, that his troops had to travel a distance of nearly sixty miles to go from one part of his base to the other if they were to avoid American roadblocks. How Caamano and his Castro boys must have laughed in their protected sector to see American surveillance turned in their behalf against the anti-Communists under General Wessin.

II

The climatic incidents which led to General Wessin y Wessin's expulsion occurred after the arrival of Ellsworth Bunker as President Johnson's final Envoy. Bunker, a man apparently devoid of any strong personal morality, was determined to force a coalition Leftist régime upon the Dominican Republic—even though he had to wade through the mire of foul play in order to do it. He personally selected Hector Garcia-Godoy, formerly Juan Bosch's Minister of Foreign Affairs, to head a Washington-approved Dominican government; and he remained complacently silent while Garcia-Godoy announced a Cabinet which was heavily loaded with those Dominicans most tainted with past Communist associations. To complete his coalition plans, and at the demand of Caamano, Bunker gave the order for the expulsion of Wessin.

At first, Bunker and his entourage attempted to play it cool. Accustomed to dealing with men who are susceptible to bribes, they decided to avoid bad publicity by buying off the General. To their consternation, they discovered that they were in the presence of that rare phenomenon—a disinterested and honest patriot. Wessin refused to be corrupted.

The next act in the manoeuvre was a summons to Wessin to report to Garcia-Godoy in the Palace. When Wessin arrived, Garcia-Godoy greeted him with cordiality and informed the General that he could choose any Dominican post in any part of the world, outside the island, with generous emoluments. But he must leave the country. General Wessin recognised the trap and asked for time to consider the offer.

Next Wessin was visited by two American officers: David Phillips of the C.I.A. and Lieutenant Colonel Joseph William

Wyrick. His visitors disclosed that they were willing to pay him \$50,000 for his Dominican house (it was actually worth less than \$12,000) if he would accept a foreign appointment and leave the country. The honorable Wessin spurned this crude attempt at outright bribery.

It was now painfully apparent to the General that he could only remain in the Dominican Republic if he secured himself with the protection of his fanatically loyal anti-Communist troops at the Armed Forces Training Centre. He decided to gather all his forces around him.

But it was already too late.

Wessin's tanks were away from the base and on duty in the city. When he ordered them back to San Isidro they were intercepted by General Palmer's troops and moved to an American-controlled airport. Wessin lodged his protest with Brigadier General John R. Deane Jr., assuring Deane that he would take precautions against any collusion. What he did not know was that the Americans, at Bunker's order, had already prepared a trap for kidnapping him.

Summoned by Lieutenant General Bruce Palmer Jr., Wessin asked Palmer to confer with him in his home. Palmer arrived accompanied by Brazilian General Hugo Panasco Alvim (the joint commander of the O.A.S. forces), and General Deane. Each was accompanied by his staff, followed by jeeps filled with armed American troops. Later Wessin learned that while he was talking to Palmer and Alvim, American troops were being posted around his San Isidro Base.

Palmer wasted no time on civilities. He told Wessin in plain soldier's language that he must leave the country. When Wessin replied that he had no intention of being exiled from his home to seal a bargain with the Communists, General Alvim sententiously observed: "You must make this sacrifice for your country."

We can imagine the thoughts that coursed through General Wessin's mind as he heard Alvim's words. He, who had devoted his life unselfishly to protecting his country against Communism, was now told that he must sacrifice himself in a dishonourable bargain made with the Communists by U.S. Envoy Bunker. Wessin gallantly refused the final bribe which they offered—the Consul Generalship in Miami.

III

From this point on, events moved rapidly. Taken to San Isidro at his request, to say goodbye to his troops, General Wessin said an informal farewell to his men—who were by now surrounded by watchful, heavily armed American paratroopers. It fell to General Deane to perform the unheroic final act of the arrest. Called to a phoney meeting by Deane, Wessin was roughly seized and thrown into a helicopter. When he asked permission to pack his belongings, he was rebuffed.

With only the clothes he stood in, without money or papers or his wife and family, he was flown to Panama. There his captors had prepared a prisoner's outfit—two suits, underwear, socks, and the inevitable toothbrush. Now the General was flown to Miami, where he was dumped. He arrived penniless. Fortunately a few friends awaited him to take care of his needs.

Such is the treatment that the United States deals out to the man who stood alone between the Dominican Republic and Communism. There was grim irony in the fact that shortly after our government kidnapped anti-Communist General Wessin, Juan Bosch returned to admiring Communist crowds in

Santo Domingo—hurling insults and defiance at the United States. Apparently this is the sort of peace which Ellsworth Bunker has planned for the Dominican Republic—a peace with Wessin in humiliating exile, with Juan Bosch filling the atmosphere with anti-American propaganda, with the Communist rebel-mutineers returned to their commands in the Dominican Army—and with the United States standing by with 9,000 Marines to guarantee the nation's Leftist future. It would be laughable, if it were not so indescribably evil.

Fortunately Wessin is not silenced, even in Miami. Thanks to open-eyed Americans, who are conscious of the political crime which their misrepresentatives have committed, Wessin's words will be heard when the voices of the Bunkers, the Martins, and the Bundys have become a subject for ridicule. He has fought a good fight, and he is not a finished man. The Dominican Republic will call him back. And he will return. President Johnson's clumsy-handed agents in Santo Domingo have not made an exile: They have created an irrepressible anti-Communist symbol.

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—From the Introduction by Robert Welch.

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