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Dominican Republic: Teachers, Physicians, & Professional Organizations Protest Economic Austerity Policies

by Barbara Khol
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On April 9, President Joaquin Balaguer's government sent troops to the city of Salcedo, located in the northeastern part of the country. The occasion was the end of first day of a 48-hour general strike called by an umbrella organization of numerous civic, professional and trade associations. The strike was called to pressure authorities into prosecuting a police officer who shot a teenager to death in mid-March. The teenager was killed during street demonstrations to pressure the government into constructing an aqueduct in the area. Meanwhile, physicians throughout the country reiterated their plans to launch a general strike beginning April 10. Health Minister Manuel Bello said that physicians who fail to report for work on April 10 would be fired. The national congress had earlier approved legislation that would increase physicians' wages to 4,500 pesos per month (US$375). President Balaguer vetoed the bill. At present, doctors earn between 1,200 and 1,740 pesos per month (US$100 to US$146). On April 10, 6,000 physicians employed at 640 public health facilities nationwide stayed off the job. The government responded by dispatching military physicians to take over emergency care operations. Also on Wednesday, Sigfrido Cabral, president of the Teachers Association, said classes in public schools would be suspended nationwide on April 11. Leaders of several professional associations including agronomists, sociologists, economists, engineers, attorneys, and architects said they were concluding preparations for a 48-hour strike. Altagracia Guzman, president of the Dominican Medical Association, asserted that President Balaguer was simply indifferent to the impoverishment of citizens. (Basic data from EFE, 04/09/91, 04/10/91; AFP, 04/10/91)

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