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Introduction

This week, Holy Week, was marked by continued political jockeying for position in--or abstention from--the as yet lackluster municipal election campaign (Item 1), by concentration on news from the United States (Item 4), by continued concern over the Capital's severe water shortage, and by continued favorable comment on the Tavera Dam loan. Two problems that have long concerned Capital residents were dealt with summarily by President Balaguer: acting partly in response to strong public criticism by outspoken Ramon C. CASTILLO, Consul General in New York, the President unceremoniously replaced the chief of the Foreign Secretariat's passport division in order to eliminate the bottleneck on issuance of new passports. More importantly, the President responded to still another strike of municipal garbage collectors by sending police and military personnel into the streets on an all-out clean-up campaign. In this he was unanimously supported by the public and the press, all of which, including leftist-nationalist El Nacional, had high praise for both Balaguer's decision and the dispatch with which the security forces were accomplishing their task.

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Uncertain notes were sounded by the attempted fire-bombing of a police officer's home in the Capital, two shooting incidents--one by overzealous guards at 1st Brigade headquarters, the other unexplained in Los Minas--which resulted in one 1st Brigade guard being wounded by mistake, and a number of unexplained arrests and house searches in the Capital and San Pedro de Macoris. The week ended with the traditional Easter moratorium on politics, but those concerned were curious as to who would eventually end up going to elections and what Balaguer was planning to do with Wessin (the President promised to deal with this subject in a proximate speech). (Limited Official Use)

1. Electoral Developments

While actual campaigning went forward in low key this week because of the approaching religious holidays, a variety of internal political considerations and external pressures made electoral participation by the PRSC and some of the 49 independent movements increasingly uncertain (SD-2209). The Social Christians, believed to be encountering fund-raising and organizational difficulties, again raised the issue of an alleged unsatisfactory electoral climate. Threatening to withdraw from the campaign, the PRSC submitted a detailed list of complaints (most involving Reformistas, not the security forces) to the Electoral Guarantees Commission. Meanwhile, PR and PRD officials, as well as civico warhorse Viriato FIALLO, reportedly mounted increasing pressures on independent movements led by activists or dissidents of their respective parties to withdraw although, to date, seemingly only the PRD has had significant success (five of eight PRD-linked movements are supposedly pulling out).

The GODR quickly defended its actions to assure a proper electoral climate, while the abstentionists leaped to take advantage of the Social Christian declarations (SD-2224). President Balaguer noted that it is easy to make unsubstantiated accusations, and asked for details as to date, place, etc. of acts supposedly interfering with the electoral process, to permit investigation and sanctioning of the guilty parties. The Electoral Guarantees Commission was sworn in April 11, while in public statements the Armed Forces and Interior Secretaries emphasized actions taken to guarantee the freedom of the elections. From the abstentionist camp, a PQD spokesman, as well as PRD legislators CASIMIRO and ESPINAL, drew on the PRSC's charges to bolster their contention that minimal conditions for opposition participation in the elections do not exist. Casimiro called on PRD independents, by name, to withdraw.

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The possibility of an anti-electoral front was also raised by Casimiro (again) and by the PQD, but stirred no immediate reaction. And, Nacional, through editorials and a number of articles highlighting alleged difficulties of opposition campaigners, fed the abstentionist fires. (CONFIDENTIAL)

Comment: PRSC participation in the election increasingly appears to be dependent on the leadership's estimation of the party's electoral chances. Should a crushing defeat appear to be imminent, the party may well seize upon the alleged unsatisfactory climate issue (which it continues to keep alive) to justify abstention. Although the varied efforts to discourage the independents are difficult to assess, it appears likely that at least some will totally withdraw, or combine with others. Of note was a budding effort to form a loose "front" of independent movements, revealed by one of the organizers to an Embassy Officer this week, and seemingly designed to mount counter-pressures against the range of abstentionist forces who appear still to be undecided concerning the nature and extent of their anti-electoral campaign. There were continued rumors of prospective efforts to disrupt the campaign by violence. (CONFIDENTIAL)

2. "Nebraska" Contract Back in News

The much-disputed "Nebraska" contract (see comment) made headlines again this week. Discussion was sparked by an editorial in Listin Diario and an article by Listin columnist Pedro Alvaro BOBADILLA charging that the company had failed to honor terms of the contract, particularly an undertaking to make certain lands available for agricultural reform. An added accusation was that a well-known agronomist, Cesar de LARA, had signed a marketing contract with the company to dispose of a bumper vegetable crop in the U.S. market; Lara allegedly was left with no profit and owing the company some RD\$40,000. Questioned by reporters, President Balaguer said the issue had been "distorted", defended the Nebraska contract as beneficial to the country, noted that some 1,200 workers are being employed by the company, and said Lara should have recourse to the courts. Listin the next day editorially--and doubtfully--expressed hopes that the company indeed was abiding by the contract terms, but Bobadilla continued to wield his pen against the company's alleged abuses, not only of Lara but of countless campesinos allegedly adversely affected by company operations. PRD Deputy Jottin CURY chimed in with an "I told you so" column in El Caribe. By week's end the hue and cry had apparently had some effect: Balaguer announced formation of a special commission to investigate the alleged irregularities. (Limited Official Use)

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Comment: The "Nebraska" contract, (in which the present operating company is the Central Aguirre--a Puerto Rican corporation which acquired its interests in the former Grenada Company lands near Montecristi from the Nebraska Consolidated Company in 1966) has been a political hot potato for the Balaguer government ever since its signing in September, 1966. The PRD--and particularly its articulate spokesman Cury--strongly opposed the contract at the time, both in and out of Congress, and ~~the~~ Lara's complaints have breathed renewed life into the issue. In late February, Lara, frustrated by alleged court inaction on his pending suit, told a Santiago Consulate officer that his case soon would appear in the press (SD-1921). (CONFIDENTIAL)

3. President Johnson's Message on Tavera Dam

President Johnson replied this week to President Balaguer's earlier message of appreciation, sent on the occasion^{NE} of the signing of the AID and IDB loans for the first stage of the Tavera Dam (SD A-541). President Johnson's message (State 144170) was delivered to President Balaguer April 10, and was carried without editorial comment in the following morning's newspapers. (Unclassified) <sup>AID(US) 9 DOM REP
ARA</sup>

4. Martin Luther King Death Evokes Strong Reaction

Martin Luther King's assassination and the disturbances it provoked in U.S. cities continued to receive prominent press and editorial coverage while inspiring a number of Dominican organizations and spokesmen to issue statements (SD 2197). Besides his previously reported initial reaction (SD 2187) President Balaguer sent Dr. King's widow a message of solidarity of the Dominican people, government and himself with the grief afflicting her. PRD Senator CASTIMIRO Castro on the party radio program April 10 associated the murder with the same forces allegedly interested in the economic strangulation of Latin America who, he said, were responsible for the late President Kennedy's death. A ceremony at the UASD April 10 heard the University Council's pronouncement that the death has deep racial and historical import and that U.S. racial abuse is taken personally by Dominicans "through whose veins runs, coming from the same source, the blood of Martin Luther King." A student participant in the ceremony called for American Negroes to fight for their rights with arms, and the FED put out a press release supporting violent struggle. Also on that date El Nacional reported the remarks of MPD Secretary General Maximiliano GOMEZ, who in substance interpreted the "deliberately planned" assassination as an imperialist maneuver to transfer the Vietnam war's political front to the U.S. King's death at the time President Johnson was going to go to Hawaii for Vietnam war discussions, the MPD leader charged, "answers to the interests of the North American monopolies". (UNCLASSIFIED)

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5. Diplomatic Notes

A. Two ambassadors to the Dominican Republic, Kyung Mok Choi from Korea and George Elshove from the Netherlands, presented credentials to President Balaguer on April 9. Mr. Elshove was Chargé d'Affaires here and his previous tours include service in Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires and Washington. General Mok Choi, who resides in Mexico and represents Korea also in Mexico and Central America, has studied extensively in the United States. He signed an agreement with Secretary of State for Foreign Relations AMIAMA Tió to further cultural, artistic, scientific and technological relations between their countries.

B. Former "constitutionalist" leader Navy Capt. MONTES Arache was transferred this week from the Hague to Paris, where he will assume similar Military Attaché duties. Although President Balaguer refused comment on the reasons why the Netherlands Government had requested the change, some press accounts indicated they had to do with alleged "immoral conduct" (SD-2226). (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE)

Comment: Our Embassy at the Hague reported confidential information that Montes Arache had been involved in a drunken incident during which he had pulled a gun on a Dutch police officer (Hague 4793). (CONFIDENTIAL)

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