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Alagoas

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ALAGOAS BRIEFING

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General Background

Originally an integral part of Pernambuco, Alagoas became an independent capitania in 1817. Today, it is the second smallest Brazilian state with a land area of only 27,731 km². Officially, almost 45% of the state lies within the drought polygon.

Alagoas' population, as might be expected, is both young (71.1% under 30) and rural (66% live in rural areas). According to a 1967 estimate, the state has a population of 1,399,000 and the highest population density (46 per km²) of any state in the Brazilian Northeast. Fortunately, the population growth rate is a low 1.4% annually, probably due to migration elsewhere.

Sugar accounts for almost one-third of the state's agricultural production. Cane cultivation in Alagoas differs from that in first-ranking Pernambuco because of differences of soil and terrain. Other main crops produced are: beans, cotton, mandioca and cocoa.

Textiles are the second most important source of revenue, accounting in 1958 for 37.8% of total value of industrial production.

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Political Situation

Alagoas has just come through a particularly stormy period in its political history and the scars are still fresh. It all began with a hotly-contested gubernatorial election in October 1965 in which none of the 5 candidates received a majority of

/the votes.

GROUP 3

Downgraded at 12-year intervals.
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of the votes. When the State Assembly refused to ratify the leading candidates, the Federal government appointed General Joao Batista Tubino as interventor of Alagoas. His caretaker administration lasted from January to September 1966 when Lamenha Filho was elected by the State Assembly.

The root causes of the political problems in Alagoas can be traced largely to the gubernatorial battle between Muniz Falcão and Rui Palmeira. Falcão, who died last June, represented just about everything that is bad in Alagoas politics: demagogy, corruption, criminal activities, violence and flirtation with Communism. His opponent, Senator Rui Palmeira, is now president of the Alagoas ARENA. Also running was Senator Arnon de Mello who fell out with Palmeira because the latter was supported by Governor Luiz Cavalcante who had earlier opposed de Mello for the Senate. Two other candidates were not taken seriously.

Falcão led the voting with 59,000 votes to Palmeira's 43,000 and de Mello's 27,000. By law, the State Assembly had 15 days in which to ratify Falcão's election or refuse, which would result in a run-off election. Feelings in Alagoas ran high and threats of violence were not unknown. The military, although officially neutral, let it be known that a vote for Falcão would be a vote against the Revolution.^{1/} General Bittencourt, Alagoas' Secretary of Public Security, publicly vowed that Falcão would never take office.

Caught between Falcão's obvious popularity among the people* and the threats of the military, the State Assembly was spared when Castello Branco signed the Second Institution Act. Since the Act abolished political parties, it was immediately suggested that a run off election would be illegal and that, if ratification of Falcão were refused, another (less controversial) solution would be found. With no time to get a legal reading on this point, the Assembly refused, on November 8, to ratify Falcão. Minutes before the vote, Col. Dilermando Gomes Monteiro, Sub-Chief of the Military Household of the Presidency told the deputies that the government would uphold their decision but asked them to consider the interests of "the state, the nation and the Revolution".

^{1/} Ironically, Falcão was Secretary-General of the Revolutionary Parliamentary Bloc in Congress and professed to be totally faithful to the ideals of the Revolution.

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The Federal Intervention

The Federal intervention of Alagoas was merely an extended "cooling off" period. General Tubino gave the state a decent but lackluster administration. Most Alagoanos looked forward to the November elections when the Falcao issue would be raised again. Falcao's death, however, changed things drastically.

The Present Government

The governor of Alagoas is Lamenha Filho (ARENA, ex-PSD), an intelligent but second echelon politician who was previously the president of the State Assembly. When the Assembly elected him governor, several MDB deputies even voted for him despite national party policy to boycott the "non-democratic" proceedings.

Like his colleagues in Ceará and Pernambuco, Lamenha Filho was chosen for the governorship because he had few enemies and a reputation for political compromise. Lamenha is proud of his reputation and believes that compromise produces political harmony and workable programs. He even appointed opposition members in his state cabinet. His 12 years in the State Assembly, gave the governor some valuable insights into the workings of Alagoas politics. He appears to be making a effort to develop the state and is generally considered to be an able executive.

The mayor of Maceió is Divaldo Suruagy, a bright, young (30) economist. Suruagy, who was backed by Palmeira, won an easy victory in the 1965 elections. He had previously served as Secretary of Finance in Governor Cavalcante's administration and also held several posts in the city government.

As is true of all Northeastern states, ARENA has a solid majority in Alagoas. Of the 9 Federal Deputies, 6 belong to the government party. In the State Assembly, the ARENA margin is 24 to 11.

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