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TO : Department of State 16 FEB 16 PM 1 38

INFO : POLAD/CINCSO, BRASILIA, BELEM, BELO HORIZONTE, CURITIBA, PORTO ALEGRE, RECIFE, SALVADOR, SÃO PAULO
ANALYSIS & DISTRIBUTION BRANCH

FROM : AmEmbassy RIO DE JANEIRO DATE: February 12, 1964

SUBJECT : Dark Horse with a Halo; a Preliminary Report on Presidential Aspirant Alziro Zarur

FEB 15 1964

REF : FILE \ No Action ARA:LA/BR R. Burton

SUMMARY

Alziro Zarur, the self-proclaimed candidate of Jesus, may have at least a negative influence on the 1965 Brazilian presidential elections because of his large, organized following among the poor and his capable propaganda network.

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Though his name seems to be painted on half the trees and walls in Brazil, and his radio campaign reaches a wide audience for hours every day, an observer confined to the Brazilian press would hardly know that Alziro Zarur existed, much less that he was a candidate for the 1965 presidential elections. Because he is almost totally ignored by the press, information about Zarur is not easy to come by. This preliminary report is based on scattered observations and on a sympathetic and rather amateurish booklet encountered in a Rio bookstore (Humberto de Sempere, A Boa Vontade de Alziro Zarur, Editora Grafica Lagunilla, Rio de Janeiro, n.d. but probably 1963).

To "respectable" and often cynical Brazilians, Zarur's candidacy appears ridiculous and even embarrassing because he claims to be the personal candidate of Jesus and because his campaign is decked in the trappings of a mystical, revivalist, quasi-Christian personal religion reminiscent of Father Devine or Daddy Grace. Yet Zarur cannot be ignored completely as a

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FORM 4-62 DS-323

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factor in Brazilian politics, since he claims an organized following of 600,000, broadcasts daily to a claimed audience of 8,000,000 on his powerful radio station, and regularly runs fourth or fifth (with 3 to 6 percent) in public opinion polls. Stories that major political leaders are worried may well be apocryphal (Kubitschek allegedly offered him the Vice-Presidency; Carlos Lacerda and Adhemar de Barros are supposed to have said that Zarur was good for over a million votes), but in a country where there is increasing popular disgust with traditional political corruption, it is not impossible that Zarur may have at least a negative influence on the outcome of the 1965 elections.

Biographic Data: Alziro (full name Alziro Abraão Elias David Zarur) was born on December 25, 1914, presumably of Lebanese parentage (he has referred on the radio to his "Eastern" origin). He apparently attended Rio's elite Pedro II secondary school, and at an early age became deeply interested in mysticism, the Bible, and even voodoo. About 1932 he began a career as radio writer and actor, and it was not until 1948 that he received his "vocation". In that year, during a spiritual seance, Zarur says he was contacted by St. Francis of Assisi, who told him that his mission had begun and that he should start by reading a biography (which he had happily purchased 15 years before) of St. Francis. Zarur did so and was inspired to begin the campaign of Good Will (Boa Vontade) that has inspired him since. He started a radio program and, two years later, founded the Legion of Good Will (Legião da Boa Vontade--LBV) which has become his organizational support. In 1956 he purchased the 50 kw Radio Mundial radio station in Rio which has since devoted itself 24 hours a day to his message. On September 5, 1959, he announced to an Extraordinary Great Assembly of the LBV the institution of the Religion of the New Commandment, and in 1962, founded the Party of Good Will (Partido da Boa Vontade--PBV) to promote his--and Jesus'--candidacy for the Presidency.

Alziro Zarur is a short, heavy, balding, undistinguished-looking man, who speaks on the radio in a deep, resonant voice. Sometime in the 1950's, he married one Iracy, a member of one of his "caravans of charity". He has two young sons, Paulo Abreu Zarur and Pedro Abreu Zarur.

Zarur's Message: The "New Commandment" of Zarur's religion is one supposedly revealed by Jesus: "Love Each Other as I Loved You". His

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religion is not an exclusive one--he considers that all religions are valid because all are given by God--and membership in the LBV is not incompatible with membership in other religious groups. Jesus speaks to the world through Zarur and from him people learn to use and have Good Will. Good Will, it seems, is love, charity, the desire to alleviate the sufferings of others, the essence of all the great religions; it is spiritual exaltation and practical love for one's fellow man. With Zarur in the presidency, advised by God, the "obsolete" party squabbles of the Communists, Socialists, and Democrats will be replaced by "modern" Good Will, Brazil will be spiritually transformed and will take its place as world leader, and the millenium will be ushered in.

Organization, Good Works, and Style: The Legion of Good Will claims some 600,000 members scattered throughout Brazil, but apparently concentrated in the center and south. Their major activities are in the field of good works, with dozens of soup-kitchens, homes for children and old people, literacy courses, medical and dental centers, free milk centers, visiting ladies, and other charitable endeavors. The emphasis is on helping the most distressed members of society. The organization is primarily financed by contributions from members, and has periodic local and national conferences.

The Party of Good Will (Motto: Truth, Power, Goodness), founded in 1962, has applied for registration as a legal political entity with a petition of 57,000 signatures. Aside from its promotion by Radio Mundial, its most noticeable activity is the painting of "Zarur-1965", "LBV", "PBV" and other slogans on walls and trees; though this is a common Brazilian practice, Zarur's name probably appears more frequently than any other single candidate in many parts of Brazil. The State of Rio de Janeiro, outside the city, is particularly heavily placarded. Other local political organizational efforts are probably underway, according to an isolated report.

Brazilians encounter Zarur most frequently over Radio Mundial. Though this station has music, news, and other traditional features, it devotes its peak afternoon and evening hours to the message of its proprietor. The usual setting is a radio "revival meeting". LBV members testify emotionally to the merits of Zarur and his candidacy, to the refrain of audience applause and shouting of slogans--"Jesus is

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Calling", "Long Live Zarur", etc. Then Zarur is introduced, and speaks slowly and unctuously in his rich bass voice, enhanced by an echo-box and by soft music (religious or movie) in the background. He exhorts his followers to love, to charity, to identification with the humble, to patience and virtue in their personal lives. And he spreads the vision of the promised land that will come when he is elected President. It is a belief of Zarur zealots that a glass of water placed by the radio while he speaks will ^{be} magnetized by him and thereafter help to cure physical and spiritual ailments.

Statistics about the Zarur movement are so far not available. According to the booklet cited above, the LBV accomplished the following activities in the State of Guanabara during 1960:

	<u>Units</u>	<u>Value in Cruzeiros</u>
Plates of soup and food	1,500,000	7,500,000
Provisions and powdered milk	240,000	10,000,000
Medical consultations	48,000	14,000,000
Medicines and prescriptions	360,000	16,000,000
Aid in money	6,000	12,000,000
Articles of Domestic use	24,000	9,000,000
Dental Assistance	<u>3,600</u>	<u>720,000</u>
	2,181,600	Cr\$69,220,000

The same source estimates total charitable distributions for an unnamed year at 1-1/2 billion cruzeiros.

Comment: Whether or not Zarur is sincere, he has thousands of devoted followers all over Brazil, most of them from the poorest and most distressed parts of Brazilian society. It is precisely this group that is beginning to awaken to the possibility of bettering its lot through political action--and that is being wooed by Communists, Brizolists, and other leftist movements. It is a group of increasing political importance, whose significance may rise spectacularly if the franchise is broadened by constitutional amendment or by an extension of adult literacy. At first sight it would seem that Zarur would take votes away from the revolutionary agitators. It may well be, however, that Zarur does not compete directly with the revolutionaries. His

religion and movement appeal more to the passive distressed, to those who seek relief from social injustice by escaping from society rather than by fighting it. In this sense, though acting as an alternative to revolutionary organizations, he may attract votes that would normally go to conservative candidates under the influence of employers, landlords, political bosses, and others who traditionally control the votes of many Brazilian poor people.

As a movement, Zarur's movement, despite its non-racial character, seems similar to the religious-social organizations which have appeared among Negroes and other distressed minority groups in the United States. It offers to the poor Brazilian favelado or peasant an organization which provides him with a feeling of belonging and of purpose, which is in a sense his own, and which offers relief outside the apparently immutable political and economic structure of Brazilian society without calling down reprisal from the Law or the Government. Through it, people who feel physically and economically powerless against a social system they cannot understand can nevertheless make themselves feel superior to those who control their lives by attaining personal goodness and "Good Will"; they can then hope that as a result of their personal virtue, there will be divine intervention which will bring their leader to power and inaugurate a heaven on earth.

Generally speaking, popular movements such as that of Zarur are indications that a poor and distressed part of society is beginning to awake from lethargy and seek relief. They are, however, usually only a temporary stage. Unless real relief is forthcoming, their adherents will eventually become less passive and turn towards a direct and revolutionary attack on social institutions. To this extent, the development of the Zarur movement may provide an indication of changing currents in Brazilian society.

For the Ambassador:

Charles C. Carson

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First Secretary

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