

TELEGRAM

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297-338-

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ACTION: Secstate WASHDC297

Date: June 16, 1966

INFO: Amembassy RIO DE JANEIRO 33 8

Amconsul SAO PAULO 40

1. MDB Executive Committee decided June 15 not to run any candidates in indirect (i.e., gubernatorial and presidential) elections this year, and will probably issue note to that effect June 16. Decision reached after several meetings with state and local leaders over past two days. Looking to November congressional elections, MDB Committee decided call MinJustice Mem de Sá to appear before Chamber Deputies in attempt force government take public stand on freedom of opposition to campaign and possibility other elected officials will be removed from office.

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2. Also June 15, ARENA Executive Committee voted in favor of replacing proportional representation with majority vote ("distribuição") in November congressional elections. Ad hoc committee will draft necessary constitutional amendment to be submitted to President. Party envisions President will forward draft amendment to Congress as executive initiative requiring speedy consideration. Of nine Executive Committee members voting, only two voted against measure.

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3. Comment: Pro-"distritão" forces in ARENA had to call Executive Committee meeting when President refused to act on proposal solely on basis petition signed by large majority ARENA deputies. It apparent President still extremely reluctant to change electoral rules. Most President expected to do to satisfy ARENA fears of defeat in this year's only direct elections is submit proposal to Congress. It likely such measure would not pass.

4. (A) MDB decision is serious one, not only for opposition but for entire electoral process this year. By refusing go along with indirect elections, MDB would seek stigmatize whole idea as "sham" and "farce" (words being bruited about congressional corridors with increasing frequency these days) and, at same time, sharpen party lines for scheduled direct elections to federal and state legislatures. MDB will probably not change decision to boycott indirect elections unless administration should decide to yield some electoral fruits to opposition.

(B) Hardening opposition attitude, reflected in decision to boycott indirect elections, stems from growing conviction they would not be allowed to win governorships (Adhemar de Barros ouster latest and most vivid case in point), as well as from reports from state and local MDB leaders.

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Provincial opposition leaders have reported widespread intimidation and pressures being brought on them, and were heavily against contesting indirect elections. MDB leaders inform us decision to boycott indirect elections met with little opposition at Executive Committee meeting, even former PSD leaders favoring abstention.

(C) Other symptoms of opposition restiveness appeared yesterday when MDB deputies created uproar in Chamber during appearance of Roberto Campos, with result that they left Chamber en masse when presiding officer insisted on calling them to order. Also yesterday, opposition leader in Senate, acting on instructions from MDB leadership, refused invitation from President to discuss new bill on job tenure with him and Roberto Campos.

(D) In sum, it appears that opposition has decided to attempt make the most of its impotence, ~~XXXXXXXX~~ and force clear definition of administration's intentions, while seeking "unmask" administration's authoritarian side. Potential danger is that such an MDB move could drive administration further down authoritarian path -- which is not intention of MDB, nor of majority of ARENA political leaders. WarMin Costa e Silva has not yet commented publicly on MDB decision, but he reportedly concerned by it. Press June 16 states he considers

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opposition boycott would have worst possible repercussion
abroad, and would lend "undesirable" aspect to his election.

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