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John Neagle

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Paraguay: Notes On Election, Candidates

by John Neagle

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Gen. Andres Rodriguez, leader of the coup which ousted the 35-year-old military dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner, has promised to bring democracy to Paraguay, and is likely to be elected president on May 1. As emphasized by opposition parties and other foreign and domestic observers, Rodriguez is nonetheless a product of the dictatorship. In 1961, Stroessner appointed Rodriguez commander of the 12,500-man First Army Corps headquartered on the outskirts of Asuncion. In subsequent years, Rodriguez received promotions and accumulated a fortune. Rodriguez's daughter Martha married Stroessner's younger son, Hugo Alfredo Stroessner Mora. Rodriguez and other members of the military hierarchy, say critics, became wealthy in various contraband ventures. The rift between Stroessner and Rodriguez is dated about two years ago in the context of a struggle within the Colorado Party over Stroessner's successor. Rodriguez supported the "traditionalists" against the "militants" who wished to see Stroessner's son, Gustavo, succeed his father. Meanwhile, Martha's marriage with Hugo Alfredo was reportedly "on the rocks." On Feb. 2 this year, Stroessner ordered Gen. Rodriguez's retirement. Rodriguez responded by returning to his base, and launched a military uprising. As a presidential candidate, Rodriguez has promised land reform to peasants, and pledged to turn power over to civilians in 1993. According to a report by daily newspaper Ultima Hora, on the evening of April 25, Hugo Alfredo Stroessner, accompanied by his wife Martha and their two daughters, unexpectedly left Asuncion on a flight for Miami. The last member of Stroessner's family to leave the country reportedly joined other family members who arrived in Miami about a month ago. Gen. Stroessner remains in Brazil. Several requests for asylum in the US have been denied. Stroessner's eldest son, air force colonel Gustavo Adolfo left Paraguay to join his father in Brazil on Feb. 5. On April 25, Lucio Benitez, leader of the Colorado Party, announced that a suit had been filed against Domingo Laino, presidential candidate of the Authentic Radical Liberal Party (PLRA). The suit would require Laino to present proof to the court of the sources of funding for his electoral campaign. Benitez said it was up to the judiciary to determine the source of the funds Laino and his party have spent to pay for his expenses, including numerous airline tickets and expenditures for trips outside the country. Laino told local reporters that he has never sought to obfuscate or hide his assets. He said, "I believe that it makes to no sense to respond to these accusations," but that if necessary he will appear in court. He added, "This is a political maneuver that has little importance." Benitez's attorney, Elias Farina Cespedes, said he believed Laino was being backed financially by foreign political parties and foundations. A book authored by Laino was released April 25 which revealed the vast amounts of money lining the pockets of officials from the former Stroessner regime from the sale of fuel. On April 26, the Paraguayan Embassy in Mexico City announced that Paraguayan citizens residing in Mexico would be permitted to vote in the May 1 elections. Voters are to elect the president, senators and deputies for the 1989-1993 period. (Basic data from AFP, 04/25/89, 04/26/89; AP, 04/26/89; Notimex, 04/26/89)

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