Written by Ivan Richard
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Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff named veteran congressman Arlindo Chinaglia from the Workers Party (PT) of São Paulo the new leader of the government in the Chamber of Deputies. He has been president of the Chamber, leader of the government and, last year, was the chief handler of the government's budget bill.

The general opinion in Congress was satisfaction with the new leader because everyone has to admit he is a very experienced congressman.

Chinaglia says he will discuss the controversial issue of temporary measures with party leaders and the president of the Lower House, Marco Maia (PT, Rio Grande do Sul), in light of last week's Supreme Court decision and the Supreme Court's immediate reversal of that decision regarding the proper legislative process for approving MPs.

The court ruled that an MP was unconstitutional because it had not gone through a congressional committee. The quick reversal came when it became apparent that dozens (perhaps hundreds) of MPs would be invalidated by the decision (including some very important ones).

Chinaglia declared he did not see any problem with having MPs go through hearings before committees, but added that he wanted to discuss the matter with other congressional leaders.

The Palácio do Planalto (Brazil's White House) has confirmed that its new leaders in Congress will be Eduardo Braga (PMDB, Amazonas) in the Senate, and Arlindo Chinaglia (PT, São Paulo) in the House. They substitute Romero Jucá (PMDB, Roraima) and Cândido Vaccarezza (PT, São Paulo), respectively.

Dilma Rousseff's government base in the Brazilian Congress consists of 18 out of 27 political parties. Although 70% of the members of Congress are supposed to be government allies, this enormous coalition is famously voracious in its party, political and personal needs.

Its appetite for jobs and money forces the president to negotiate each and every vote separately and the results depend on whether or not the base is satisfied at that particular moment.

The constant horse-trading with its own base in Congress by the executive branch has far-reaching consequences throughout the government.

For example, the president of Brazil can make over 23,000 political appointments. These are the aides and assistants who should help administer the government with their special skills and expertise, but most of them have their jobs based exclusively on political connections.

At the same time, the president manages the government with an unwieldy cabinet that consists of over 35 ministries and most of them are also where they are because of political connections and/or necessities.

The latest change of leadership in Congress came about after a rebellion in the vast ranks of Dilma Rousseff's government base that resulted in a vote in the Senate that denied approval to a nomination she made. Dilma wanted a competent aide to return to a position where he had much needed experience. The Senate vote was 36 to 31 against her.

As leaders of the government, senator Braga and deputy Chinaglia are responsible for coordinating the government's base in Congress and negotiating the passage of legislation that is in the government's interest.

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