

Close Ally of Brazilian President Loses Political Rights

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A Brazilian court suspended the civil rights of Sao Paulo's former mayor, Marta Suplicy, for a three-year period because of improper management of public funds while she was in office.

The ruling against Ms. Suplicy who managed Brazil's largest city from 2001 to 2004, was issued by Judge Christiane Santini.

Ms. Suplicy a close friend of Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and a key member of his leftist Workers Party (PT) can appeal the ruling, which, if upheld, would ruin her plans to run for Governor of São Paulo in 2006.

According to the judge, Ms. Suplicy and São Paulo municipal education secretary Maria Aparecida Perez engaged in administrative malfeasance when in 2003 they hired, without a prior bidding process, a non-governmental organization to provide public school teachers with training in sexual-orientation issues.

The organization was the Sexual Orientation Research Work Group, which former sexologist Ms. Suplicy founded in 1990 and of which she was honorary chairman until 2000.

The municipality paid the NGO the equivalent of US\$ 835,000 arguing no bidding was necessary because the organization was non-profit and had educational experience, according to the newspaper Folha de S. Paulo.

Ms. Suplicy sought re-election last year but was defeated by center-right José Serra, a former Cabinet minister who lost the 2002 presidential contest to current President Lula da Silva.

Since then she has been competing with other Workers Party leaders for the São Paulo gubernatorial nomination.

Ms. Suplicy's court ruling could not have come at a worse moment. The ruling party, the PT, is struggling to overcome a nationwide corruption scandal over alleged bribes to members of Congress from other parties to ensure support for the Lula administration sponsored bills.

The first victim of the scandal was the once all powerful José Dirceu, President Lula's top political advisor and who masterminded the Workers Party victory in 2002.

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