

Brazil's Squealer Congressman First in Line for House Guillotine

Contributed by Luciana Vasconcelos
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The Brazilian Chamber of Deputies' Ethics Council (Conselho de Ética e Decoro Parlamentar da Câmara) has concluded its investigative process against deputy Roberto Jefferson (PTB party from Rio de Janeiro state) with a recommendation that he be expelled.

That decision comes 80 days after the council began examining the case and was approved by a 14 to zero vote. However, it is on the floor of the Chamber in a secret vote that the question will be decided.

To expel a deputy, a total of 257 votes out of 513 are needed. If expelled, besides losing his seat in the Congress and his parliamentary privileges and immunity, Jefferson will be prohibited from running for office again until 2015.

A final floor vote on the expulsion of Roberto Jefferson is expected two weeks from now during the week of September 12 (next week Brazil celebrates Independence Day).

Jefferson is an experienced criminal lawyer and an excellent public speaker. According to deputy Luiz Antonio Fleury (PTB - São Paulo), Jefferson will probably be his own defense lawyer and may be able to convince the Chamber to absolve him. "He's a very good lawyer," said Fleury.

The motion to expel Jefferson was presented by the PL because of charges he made concerning the existence of a vast payoff scheme in Congress, which has become popularly known as the "mensalão" - big monthly allowance.

According to Jefferson, the PT was making monthly payments to members of the PP and PL parties, which were government allies, to ensure that they voted with the government. He also revealed that cronyism and kickbacks were rife in state-run enterprises.

The motion to expel him was based on the fact that Jefferson made his accusations without presenting proof. Finally, Jefferson also confessed that he had personally received what amounted to an illegal payment of US\$ 1.7 million (4 million reais) from the PT to pay for his party's (PTB) 2002 campaign expenses.

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