

Brazil: Lula Still Disappeared from São Paulo Scene

Contributed by Guy Burton
Monday, 18 October 2004

After the speculation about whether or not President Lula will be supporting his party colleague and current mayor, Marta Suplicy (PT), in her re-election bid, the party's campaign strategist has weighed in to quell discussion.

Duda Mendonça says that Lula will enter at the 'head of Marta's campaign' and the relationship between President and Mayor has 'never been so good.'

Well, that's just wonderful, but there are only two weeks to go until the second round. And where exactly is the star of the show?

On Saturday he was spotted not in São Paulo, but near Brasília, dressed in a hat, white shirt and shorts with dark glasses.

Was he trying to hide?

And if Marta was hoping that she might get support from other members of the party, no such luck. While Lula is hanging out in Brasília (why?), his ministers are all out hunting for the vote in places other than São Paulo.

On the Box Again

Friday was the first day of free election publicity for the second round. Marta's TV ad included an attack on José Serra's (PSDB) health policies and a list of the boroughs where she had done well in the first round:

'You are my army in the second round,' she said. Meanwhile Serra was busy talking about planning and the need to 'put people first' in his spot.

But don't worry. All this anodyne stuff will soon be at an end and everyone can then return to their telenovelas in peace – or at least until 2006.

Meanwhile yesterday's spots both led on health, Serra using footage of hospitals and Marta getting the endorsement of Antonio Palocci – a doctor himself and Lula's Finance Minister (which presumably offers the underlying message of financial security and balance as well).

Meanwhile the Folha comes up with some astounding news: the two candidates manipulated statistics to fit their own arguments during Thursday night's debate.

Can you imagine that? The thought that a politician might stoop so low!

The Problems of Globalisation?

For the last two days I've been attending the European Social Forum here in London (I've still got my wristband on in the vain hope I might get a concession at a gig later this evening).

At one of the events we heard of one activist who had been campaigning for several years against the use of electronic voting machines in Brazil. Well, he might be pleased to hear they are being moved – to Equador for their elections today.

Perhaps that wasn't quite what he was hoping for when he started the protest...

Comical Paulo Moment

There's dissension in the ranks. Despite the national PP and Paulo Maluf's support for Marta, not everyone is happy. The PP council candidates who didn't get elected to City Hall published a letter on Saturday stating their support for Serra instead.

Which does beg the question: where does the PP sit? Although you wouldn't have known that Maluf had given Marta his support, if you check Marta's website.

Pleasingly, Maluf hasn't lost his Comical Paulo touch despite being investigated for tax evasion and money laundering news this week and the statement he made to police. He claimed at a press conference that his support for Marta embarrasses many in the PP.

Funny that. I thought it was more the other way round.

New Poll

Saturday also brought more bad news for Marta. A new Datafolha poll shows that Serra is still leading Marta, by 52% to 40%. Both have risen one point since last week.

Those who don't know or are planning to vote 'white' (a way of registering abstention) total 8%.

More galling for petistas though, is the fact that having courted and got right-wing support in the guise of Maluf, of those who voted for him in the first round 69% will go for Serra compared to 16% for Marta.

As if that wasn't bad enough, two-thirds of voters believe that Serra will win while the PT is asking the electoral authorities to allow it to increase its budget in the contest from 15 millions reais (US\$ 5 million) to 19 million reais (US\$ 6.3 million).

The Datafolha poll also shows that 96% of paulistanos will also be staying in the city to vote in the second round, despite there being a public holiday on the day after the election (as well as one in the week before – the Day of the Public Worker on the 28th).

And worried eyes in the PT will be looking at the article in the New York Times which controversial journalist Larry Rother has published on the Sao Paulo elections titled "Brazil's Leader Shows Gains Everywhere Except Where It Counts Most."

Rother, some readers may recall, was responsible for an article earlier this year which suggested Lula liked a drink or two.

Nothing to See Here!

Still, there's precious little for the left of the PT to celebrate either. While it's not related to São Paulo, an Ibope poll shows that the leftist petista candidate, Raul Pont, is trailing in Porto Alegre by a similar margin, by 51% to 39%.

If the PT loses Porto Alegre it will be the first time it has been out of power down there since 1988. And its role as the symbol of the new democratic left, including the participatory budget and the World Social Forum, will take a huge knock.

For more information and analysis of the São Paulo and other local Brazilian results, visit the election blog being run by Guy Burton and Andrew Stevens at www.saopaulo2004.blogspot.com.