

Brazil: A Truckload of Trouble for Politician Maluf

Contributed by Guy Burton
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A case was put against failed candidate Paulo Maluf (PP) by prosecutors in front of the relevant authorities yesterday. He's alleged to have been involved in administrative impropriety during his time as mayor of São Paulo (1993-96), which involves more than 5 billion reais (US\$ 1.6 billion).

Adilson Laranjeira, Maluf's press secretary, welcomed the case, wince it would enable the former mayor to defend himself against "crimes he never committed."

But he then went and spoiled his copybook by alleging that the move was also decided to discredit his boss and benefit José Serra's (PSDB) chances at the same time.

And presumably they are behind the death of Princess Diana and JFK as well...

I presume Maluf's going to have a lot to answer for though: a truck had to deliver 10,000 cheques and 20 kilos of documents from Swiss banks to the authorities to wade through.

And just when you think it couldn't get worse for Maluf, later on the same day, Federal Justice (what a name!) stated that he had become a defendant in another case which involved foreign currency evasion.

According to the investigator, Maluf illegally sent the sum of 440 million reais (US\$ 147 million) abroad – which just happens to be one of the cases of administrative impropriety against him: 440 million reais appeared to go missing from public funds.

It just gets murkier and murkier...

Holding Back...

The government's leader in the Senate, Aloizio Mercadante, announced yesterday that votes on public private partnerships – which is causing such angst amongst the Left – won't be voted on in the Senate for another three weeks. It won't escape people's notice that that's conveniently after the second round elections.

Cheer Up

Meanwhile, recently re-elected Rio mayor, Cesar Maia (PFL), was making the Paulistanos feel good about themselves. He was supporting Serra's candidacy and was reported to say that "Rio depends a lot on São Paulo. São Paulo is the great economic tractor of the southeast. When São Paulo does well, Rio does well, when São Paulo grows, Rio grows too."

Tucano Thinking

Following Marta Suplicy's (PT) commitment to freeze bus fare prices at 1.70 reais (US\$ 57), Serra had to go along with the same statement yesterday. However, the catch is that he will do so, assuming the figures are correct.

Not only does this enable him to stick like a limpet to one of Marta's more valued contributions to the city (i.e. better public transport), it also implies a degree of doubt about PT estimates and figures and offers a get-out-clause as well.

After all this scheming, it's a wonder that these Machiavellian politicians have time to press the flesh!

Petista Angles

Marta's campaign has been given authorisation by the election authorities to increase her budget for election expenditure from 15 million (US\$ 5 million) to 19 million reais (US\$ 6.3 million).

But it may well be a case of good money after bad if she doesn't start to change around the voting intentions in the city.

Instead her campaign seems to be getting more aggressive and increasingly shrill. And despite the government having to make a statement contradicting her on Monday – that a Serra victory would mean less funds for São Paulo – she's gone back and said exactly the same thing yesterday.

You do have to wonder whether taking this line is particularly productive; not least because by using the government as a threat, Marta might very well affect voters' impressions of President Lula (who has been receiving favourable poll ratings over the last few months).

Putting His Foot in It

Finally, while the public seem to approve of him, it seems Lula can do little without courting controversy, whether it be as a consequence of Marta's comments or not.

After being fined 50,000 reais (US\$ 17,000) for improper use of a public event where he praised Marta's achievements as mayor in São Paulo, he's being asked to explain his conduct once again.

This time it's alleged that he used public space to support the petista candidate in the city of Londrina in Paraná state.

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.