

Waiting for President Godot in São Paulo, Brazil

Contributed by Guy Burton
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Yesterday Ibope and Datafolha both published their latest polls. According to Ibope, compared to last week José Serra's (PSDB) figures have fallen from 52% to 51%, but he still maintains a strong lead over the current mayor, Marta Suplicy (PT).

Marta saw her share fall from 39% to 37%. In contrast Datafolha shows that while Serra fell one point to 51%, Marta has risen, from 40% to 41%. The Ibope poll is subject to a 3% margin of error while Datafolha has a variable 2% at the edges.

And both candidates are starting to suffer from a war of attrition. Rejection levels have risen, to 45% for Marta and 32% for Serra.

Furthermore, 60% of Paulo Maluf (PP) voters won't vote for Marta, while only 28% will do so.

And despite it all, Maluf still went and spent 21,000 reais (US\$ 7,000) at an event with 500 malufistas yesterday, to lobby on behalf of Marta.

Whether Marta is improving her position or not (and the rejection levels will certainly not help), what seems clear is that Marta isn't shifting sufficient votes towards her despite the fact that there's only just over a week to go.

Music and Minds to the Rescue

Heeding the call, the Culture Minister and musician, Gilberto Gil, will be heading to São Paulo with several intellectuals to show solidarity with Marta.

After his Green Party's decision to throw its lot in with Serra last week he's got some contrition to make.

But notably absent on the list of grandees visiting is the name of President Lula – who we keep hearing, will be supporting Marta at some point but never shows.

You almost imagine Marta and her main congressional supporter, Aloizio Mercadante (the government leader in the Senate), to be sitting on a bench, waiting for the President, who never comes.

Then again, after yesterday there may be good reasons why President Godot – sorry, I meant Lula – is being coy.

The electoral authorities upheld the 50,000 reais (US\$ 17,000) fine meted against Lula for his over-enthusiastic endorsement of Marta at a public event in São Paulo before the first round.

It was quite clear to: five judges voted in favor, with only one against.

Asking the Wrong People

It looks like Marta is chasing the housewives' vote. For the third time in a week she's been campaigning in shopping centers in the city. As well as having photographs taken, she gave out autographs.

Unfortunately for her, at least three people walked out of the shops she was just about to enter on hearing of her approach. And after spending several minutes trying to persuade some men drinking beer at a bar to vote for her, she found out they weren't from São Paulo at all.

It's all a bit hit-and-miss sometimes, isn't it? But I'm amazed the centers' owners let her campaign within the building. During my own election bid in London we had to stand outside on the pavement, sometimes in the pouring rain.

Medical Attention

The São Paulo state government, led by Serra's party colleague, Geraldo Alckmin, is going to hold a big health-focused event on Saturday, eight days before the second round.

The governor hopes to raise the profile of health, which has been the main label on the Serra campaign.

Call me cynical, but doesn't the PSDB grumble and complain when the federal government carries out shows of support for its candidate in what is supposed to be a local election?

The words pot, kettle and black are bouncing about in my mind, screaming for attention.

Politics on TV

Alckmin also got a right to reply during the PT's TV spot last night.

Earlier in the week the party had time taken away after making accusations against the governor, which displeased the electoral authorities.

Of the rest of the TV coverage, the PSDB used it to attack Aloizio Mercadante while the PT focused on showing Marta's contribution to education in the city.

Serra - Working Class Hero

Serra announced his support for some of Paulinho's election proposals. Paulinho, you may recall, was the PDT candidate and threw his support behind Serra soon after the first round.

He's managed to extract commitment from Serra to bring in unemployment passes and solidarity centers for the workers if he gets elected.

As if to reinforce his image as a champion of workers' rights, he also visited a factory where he made the interesting announcement that they shouldn't be allowed to just up and leave São Paulo.

Given that he used to be a minister in a neoliberal government, I'm really keen to hear how he proposes to put that aim into effect.

Still, I can't be too critical of the man. At the very least, he was in a factory, meeting workers at 5.30 in the morning – when most of us are still in bed and shocking radio listeners when he gave a 9 o'clock interview:

"Campaigning at 5.30 in the morning?" was about all the incredulous interviewer could manage. But it's OK. Apparently Serra can manage on four and a half hours of sleep – which makes him similar to that another former neoliberal

enthusiast, Margaret Thatcher.

Meanwhile Marta announced an administrative change down at City Hall, despite the fact that she has officially renounced her position as mayor until the election.

When asked, she refused to say whether the measure had been taken on her vice-mayor's initiative.

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.