

In São Paulo, Brazil, a Campaign Manager Bites the Dust

Contributed by Guy Burton
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Marta Suplicy's (PT) campaign manager, Duda Mendonça was arrested at the end of last week for taking part in a cockfight. Along with him was a recently re-elected PT councillor from Rio.

Two hundred people were found at the farm where the event took place and Duda was remanded in custody overnight. Later on Friday, he was indicted for three crimes against animals.

José Serra (PSDB) was magnanimous after the event, promising not to use it against his rival in the election campaign.

This gave some breathing space to Marta, who was obliged to make a statement later that same day.

She said she was against cockfights, but that Duda would continue to work for her. However, he was to be temporarily relieved of direct duties.

But even if Serra isn't making political capital out of the whole incident, his party colleagues are.

The PSDB congressman, Alberto Goldman, claimed that Duda's arrest in Rio state showed that he wasn't involved in the PT campaign.

By contrast, the Estadão's political guru, Fátima Pacheco Jordão, doesn't think that the incident will make much difference to the final result.

Interestingly, when he first heard of the situation, President Lula thought Duda was playing a joke on him – which might give you an insight into the relationship between the two men, ever since Duda worked on Lula's own campaign two years ago.

Finally for those readers who perhaps feel the main area of concern has been overlooked, the Federal Police informed the press that the birds would receive medical attention.

Lula Spotted - in São Paulo!

On Saturday morning, Lula was finally to be seen in São Paulo. He helped inaugurate a new museum of Afro-Brazilian culture.

He didn't make any 'helpful' comments about Marta this time around though—last time he did so, he got into hot water and was fined R\$50,000 (US\$ 17,000) for abusing a public event.

Instead he left it to Celso Frateschi, the city's culture secretary, to make the eulogies to the absent (Marta not being present at the occasion).

I wonder how long it takes before Frateschi is landed with a complaint...

Rubbish Tax

Serra was busy making new pledges on Friday. He said that if elected he would get rid of the rubbish tax which Marta introduced two years ago.

Within two years the tax would be gone, which would mean two million people would no longer have to pay it (currently varying between R\$6 (US\$ 2) and R\$133 (US\$ 45).

He's also worried about the public holiday coming up this Thursday – the Day of the Public Sector Worker. He and elements within the state administration are concerned that with many people taking the weekend off – which would most likely include many of his middle class support – that could have an impact on his share of the vote on Sunday.

TV on Friday

Friday's TV spots involved Geraldo Alckmin making a plug for Serra in the tucano effort while Marta's concentrated on her involvement in improving the city's educational infrastructure.

Meanwhile, it looks like there will be a debate between Marta and Serra on TV Record on Wednesday evening, after an agreement appeared to be hammered out the same day.

Maluf in the Dock

The Paulo Maluf (PP) saga continues. On Friday a judge blocked his accounts and those of 36 others, including his wife and children.

It is part of the investigation into an alleged 5 billion reais (1.7 billion) of public funds, which disappeared during his time as mayor of São Paulo, between 1993 and 1996.

He is also being asked to explain the removal of US\$ 440 million abroad, to foreign accounts which he claims not to have.

Naturally, Maluf thought the process 'absurd' and pledged to challenge the decision.

Campaign Tears

Friday also saw Marta continuing her visits to shopping centres, this time with the recently elected PT mayor of Recife, João Paulo, in tow.

The following day she was visiting old people and residents of northeast origin, as well as yet more traders and businessmen.

But it wasn't long into the day before the tears started coming. Marta found herself crying at the meeting with the elderly, complaining that she was being 'persecuted' by the media. Well, you know what they say: if you can't stand the heat...

Serra was having very little of it as well. "What's being judged is her administration," he said when asked to comment on her tears, captured across the press later on.

But for a change there appeared to be a truce of sorts in the Saturday spots on TV. Marta's focused on the changes and development in the city, including the creation of new jobs. Meanwhile, Serra's focused on his program for governing São Paulo.

No Impact

Following the polls carried out last week, it seems clear that the attacks being made by the PT against Serra's running mate, Gilberto Kassab, are having little effect.

The purpose of the PT strategy was to try and draw a connection between Serra and the late, unlamented administration of Celso Pitta (1997-2000), in whose cabinet Kassab served as secretary for planning.

Brazilians Abroad

Finally, although Andrew and I are ploughing a lonely furrow with this election in São Paulo, the Folha brings forth an article which flags up another poll which will be taking place at around the same time – the US presidential election.

And chances are that of the roughly 31,000 naturalised Brazilians in the US, many won't be thinking about Brazil when they make their choice between Bush and Kerry on Tuesday week.

OK, it's got nothing to do with the Serra-Marta race, but cut me some slack, will you?

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.