
Fight's Up in São Paulo, Brazil. Let's Count the Votes!

Contributed by Guy Burton
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President Lula is asking the Justice Minister to refine the charges against Marta Suplicy's (PT) campaign manager, Duda Mendonça. He suspects his arrest at a cockfight last week may well have been motivated by his political rivals, who maintain contacts at some levels in the Federal Police.

You can get the Left into government, it seems. But getting them to trust the machine of state is another matter entirely.

A congressman from the conservative PFL party, Fernando de Fabinho, would like to legalise all animal fights, from cockerels to pit bulls. 'It's animal nature. It's not cruel. It's a Brazilian custom not to do anything bad to anyone else. We need to decriminalise it.'

Can I propose a supplementary law which would allow right-wing baiting with a cattle prod as well?

Close, But Not Close Enough

We noted in this column the other day that Marta was closing the gap on José Serra (PSDB) – but perhaps not enough before the election takes place.

Unfortunately, her rejection level still remains above Serra's too. Even though it fell by two points to 43% over the last week, Serra's has also dropped as well, by one to 32%.

As readers may recall, we noticed that the PT look like they may lose Porto Alegre for the first time since taking power there in 1988.

As a result, the state Governor, Germano Rigotto (PMDB), believes that the party is more concerned about doing well in that contest than São Paulo.

And you can see his point: Porto Alegre is the symbol that the PT presents to the world, as the birthplace of participatory budgeting (now recognised and applauded by institutions like the World Bank and the UN) and the World Social Forum.

Polls later showed that the current PT mayor was five points behind his challenger.

Meeting the Masses

On Thursday, during the religious festival, Serra made a visit to a church in the south of the city. His arrival, coinciding with the mass, caused chaos.

He had to take refuge in the back until the service was over before he could address the audience. Meanwhile, on the same day Marta was promising to bring more of her educational centres to the centre of the city if re-elected.

She also made plans to carry out a campaign on the Metro on Saturday to try and drum up support among its users.

I wonder whether we would be allowed to get away with that on London's underground. Probably not, but then it wouldn't make much sense anyway.

Can you imagine being a candidate wedged up against someone's armpit and unable to move, let alone speak? I wonder if Marta's given any thought to how she's going to tackle that.

Speaking of London, the Estadão notes that the Financial Times has picked up on the potential problems for the PT in São Paulo and Porto Alegre. I wonder whether we can claim to be one of their sources.

It's All Overblown

After the barbed criticisms made by Eduardo Suplicy's girlfriend, Monica Dallari, against his former wife, Marta, Eduardo went public on Thursday.

He tried to downplay the comments she had made last week, which seemed designed to weaken and discredit Marta's campaign.

I'm not buying it though. What about you?

Support comes to Marta from another quarter though. Gilberto Dimenstein, a Folha columnist, believes that Marta is being persecuted by the media because of her feminist image, including her role in breaking up with Eduardo. Unfortunately for her, Suplicy is extremely popular in São Paulo.

Grumble

TV Globo has complained to the PSDB not to use images of their journalist Chico Pinheiro or the SPTV logo on their electoral publicity anymore. They claim that their use has never been authorised.

Disappearing Voters

Headmaster Serra also had campaign workers out on Thursday handing out leaflets to encourage São Paulo residents not to go away this weekend.

The leaflets carry the phrase: 'For São Paulo don't travel this weekend. Swap four days for four years.'

He will be worried, not least by estimates of 1.3 million cars leaving the city for a long weekend, brought about by the public holidays at the end of this week and on Monday.

The more who leave, the less will be around to vote for Headmaster Serra – or so the logic goes.

And Paulo Maluf (PP) will be voting as soon as polls open, at 8am before leaving the city to take advantage of the holiday weekend.

I suspect that's one voter the Serra camp would be quite happy to see take the whole weekend off.

On the Box

Friday night, was debate night between the candidates. It was also the end of free TV publicity for the two as well.

During the TV spots Marta used the opportunity to remind the voters about her efforts in creating bus lanes, education centres and the single public transport ticket.

Serra told the electorate about his work as Health Minister, including generic medicines, increased AIDS drug availability and action against cataracts.

In the later TV ads in the evening, Marta focused on the narrowing of the polls over the last few weeks, while Serra banged on about health.

The same themes followed in the debate after. Marta talked about her education policies and the likelihood of Serra not continuing them if he was elected.

The tucano explored the issue of health in the city and criticised the federal government's cut in social projects. Refreshingly, there were few personal attacks on display.

Then again they were probably told by advisers not to do so, since it would have been churlish and gone down badly with voters this close to polling day.

The debate drew 32 points – in TV parlance – equating to around 1.5 million households. That's a huge improvement on the first debate after the second round, which then drew only 11 points.

Both candidates will hope they did well. Estadão guru, Fátima Pacheco Jordão, said before the event that the debate would be a huge risk for both and that the candidates' performances could well have an impact on the eventual result.

But Ibope pollster, Márcia Cavallari, doesn't see the contest as evenly balanced as that. She reckons that a win for Marta would be 'very difficult', given the current figures.

Rallies

Friday also saw the two parties put on rallies to raise their candidates' profiles. The PT brought together 500 people along Avenida Paulista while the PSDB drew a similar sized crowd in other central streets, culminating in the Sé Square (Praça da Sé).

Dodgy...

The electoral authorities ordered the seizure of leaflets circulating in the city that were decked out in blue and yellow, the tucano colours.

The leaflets carried the phrase: 'Politics is a man's thing. A woman's place is in the kitchen.'

The PSDB has contacted its lawyers while the PT's campaign team deny that this is dirty tricks on their part.

Unlikely...

Finally, the PSDB is trying to 'paulistise' the election in Vitória, capital of Espírito Santo state.

With the PT leading the PSDB in the second round, the tucanos are trying to discredit the petistas by linking them with Maluf.

Which is laughable, as anyone who knows the PT in that state knows: they managed to drum out many of the moderate centrists in their party quite effectively seven years ago.

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.