

Brazil Election Bodes Well for Kerry

Contributed by Guy Burton
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With 99% of the vote counted, it is official: José Serra (PSDB) takes the mayoralty of São Paulo. With 55% of the vote (3.3 million) against Marta Suplicy's (PT) 45% (2.71 million), he's the first member of his party to win a mayoral election in the city.

Serra's first words were to say that "Democracy was strengthened by this vote, despite it being on a public holiday. São Paulo's people preferred not to swap four days of holiday for four years of its future, for four years in City Hall."

Marta's response was to say that "We did our part for democracy. I want to compliment my rival and hope that he will make the best possible government for the city of São Paulo."

Elsewhere the PT lost the southern city of Porto Alegre. The party president, José Genoíno, admitted that there were 'two heavy defeats' and took a philosophical approach, by saying that "People learn from defeat and learn from victory."

President Lula's chief-of-staff, José Dirceu, believed this wouldn't end in any lasting damage for the PT: "Many of us have lost elections and after we were elected to key positions in the country."

And with the champagne still on ice, attention shifts towards the presidential elections in two years' time.

Noting that São Paulo state has now been governed by the PSDB for ten years, the result in São Paulo city must also be attributed to the support governor Geraldo Alckmin gave to Serra.

Senator Romeu Tuma of the PFL (allies of the PSDB in Congress), said that "The PFL and the PSDB will form a joint party line which will open the road to Geraldo Alckmin. Who doesn't want Geraldo Alckmin as president?"

Before we leave the São Paulo poll, it's worth reflecting that the candidate with the least charisma won. What implications does this have for the wider world?

With other signs apparent, including the Washington Redskins' defeat at the weekend, the Boston Red Sox victory in last week's World Series, Portsmouth's defeat of Manchester United and a possible left-wing president emerging in Uruguay, what chances another wooden man will come through in the United States tomorrow night?

Before You Cancel Your Tickets...

It would be worth dwelling on some of the aftershocks of the Porto Alegre result. Just as the international Left begins to take notice of the city (and believe me as someone who was born in the place, the city is hardly anything to write home about), highlighting its participatory budget process and home of the World Social Forum, what do the people go and do?

Vote out the people who brought it all in. I can well imagine Red Pepper readers (and perhaps editors) gnashing their teeth at the absurdity of such an ungrateful electorate.

Still, not to worry: soon after his victory, the newly elected mayor, José Fogaça (PPS), promised that he would continue much of the work begun by the PT there as well as form new ones: "I want to reaffirm my promise that we are going to work for all..."

New Administration, Same Problems...

While discussion about who will stand for the PSDB as president in 2006 continues, Serra has had an unwelcome introduction to his new role.

Soon after midnight, more than 3,000 homeless people invaded government buildings in the city, protesting about the lack of housing.

The movement is an urban variant on the landless peasant movement (MST), which has realised that the only way to get government to act is to occupy.

Welcome to City Hall, Serra!

Elsewhere...

Further afield, I can give a short analysis of the results from the more than 40 contests which took place yesterday.

The winners were the PT and the PSDB, with the petistas winning 11 and the tucanos nine. Both also topped the list of losing candidates, with the PT on 12 and the PSDB on 10.

In those where the two parties went head-to-head against each other, the PT won out, by six to four.

Of course absolute figures will not compensate for the defeat of São Paulo and Porto Alegre (where the PT's Raul Pont lost by 53% to 47%).

Furthermore, as the daily *Estadão* points out, the PSDB won five state capitals against the PT in three (including – remarkably – Vitória in Espírito Santo where the PSDB had reigned supreme since 1992).

According to political scientist Lúcia Hipólito, "The result shows a balance of PT and PSDB forces. The electorate distributed their votes [in such a way] not to create a unified hegemonic force."

So Now You Know.

What's it all mean?

I'm sure Andrew and I will come back to analyse the São Paulo and other results in more detail later on.

But one of the joys of writing your own blog is that you can comment as much as you like. One other issue though which I think we should raise – and which I'm sure either we or someone else will come back to later – is the question of where it leaves the PT.

Whereas there seems general agreement of a polarisation between two political blocs, led by the PT and the PSDB, what of the internal dynamics of the former?

Before Andrew and I started this blog I was running pieces on the state of the election campaign on my personal blog. I highlighted a paper written by prominent petista Emir Sader, which assessed the party's prospects, drawing on São Paulo and Porto Alegre.

He argued that if São Paulo was won it would strengthen the party's moderate wing and Lula. But if São Paulo was lost that would mean a corresponding rise in the fortunes of the PT Left.

It's worth noting that Sader saw São Paulo as the variable and a Porto Alegre victory as given. But what happens now that both wings of the party have suffered such a shocking defeat?

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.