

Key Ally of Brazil's Lula Resigns Senate Presidency over Corruption Charges

Contributed by Newsroom
Wednesday, 05 December 2007

Brazilian senator Renan Calheiros, the president of Brazil's Senate resigned this Tuesday, December 4, while fighting allegations of corruption. Calheiros, a key ally of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, retained his position as a senator but announced he was resigning the presidency in what analysts said was a gambit to avoid expulsion from the Senate.

The maneuver seems to have worked since the president of the Senate's Ethics Board, Leomar Quintanilha, announced today that he decided to drop two motions against Calheiros presented by opposition parties.

In one of the charges filed by the PSOL party, the Senate's former president is accused of participating in a scheme to raise illegal money in ministries led by his own party, the PMDB. The second charge, brought by the PSDB and DEM parties, alleges that Calheiros had concocted a plan to spy on opposition congressmen.

A legislative commission voted 17-3 last week to recommend his expulsion after finding evidence that he used third parties to illegally acquire two radio stations and a newspaper.

He narrowly survived a similar Senate vote in September after the Ethics Committee accused him of taking some US\$ 8,000 a month in bribes to help a construction company win government contracts. Calheiros has denied all of those allegations.

The senator was convinced that resignation from the post of Senate leader might help sway other lawmakers against expelling him completely.

"He evidently felt it was a more important to obtain the good will of the other senators," said political commentator Lucia Hippolito of the Globo TV network.

Calheiros has been on a leave of absence since October, when colleagues threatened to boycott sessions he presided over.

His replacement is not known, but the change was not expected to affect President Lula da Silva's ability to push bills through the legislature.

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