

## Weekly Report - 19 April 2005

### **BRAZIL: Watchdog reveals roster of congressional malfeasance**

**The government of President Lula da Silva may have two ministers under investigation but his Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) can boast that not a single one of its legislators has been indicted or is being investigated by the supreme court - no mean feat, given that one out of every six Brazilian legislators is in one or other of those situations.**

Brazilian legislators, like their peers in most Latin American countries, used to enjoy broad immunity from prosecution. This ended in 2002, when the rules were changed to allow the supreme court to prosecute them, and government ministers, without having to wait until they complete their terms. Last week Congressoemfoco\* ('Congress in Focus'), a non-governmental congressional watchdog published on the internet by the journalist Antônio Vital, produced a tally of the workload this has created for the supreme court.

The court has initiated 185 investigations involving 102 legislators charged with an array of offences ranging from slander to embezzlement, fiscal and electoral crimes, breaches of environmental rules, arson and phonetapping. In 35 of the investigations it has found enough evidence to indict 23 legislators.

Two of these, congressmen Jackson Barreto and Ronivon Santiago, share the doubtful distinction of heading the league table, with four separate indictments each. Both of them belong to the Partido Progressista (PP), the party of Severino Cavalcanti, the president of the lower chamber who has been giving the Lula administration a hard time.

The party with the largest number of investigated or indicted legislators (six congressmen and three senators) is the Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB), Lula's most important ally in congress. Among the indicted pemedebistas is Jader Barbalho, a former president of congress.

The second-runner is the Partido Liberal (PL) led by Vice-President José Alencar, with six congressmen and one senator on the supreme court's worksheet.

\* [www.congressoemfoco.com.br](http://www.congressoemfoco.com.br)

## Weekly Report - 17 May 2005

### **BRAZIL: Lula's strongest rival barred from running**

**The strongest of President Lula da Silva's potential rivals in the 2006 elections may have been knocked out of the race by the ruling of an electoral court. Former Rio de Janeiro governor Anthony Garotinho has been barred from running for office for three years for using his authority to stack the cards in favour of a mayoral candidate.**

The beneficiary was Carlos Alberto Campista, who last year won the mayoralty of Campos in Rio de Janeiro state. Governor Rosinha Matheus (Garotinho's husband) and Garotinho himself were convicted of limiting entitlement to social programmes to those inhabitants of Campos who pledged their vote to the mayoral candidate of the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB).

The electoral court in Campos last week ordered the dismissal of mayor Campista and imposed three-year bans on both Garotinho and Matheus running for office. Garotinho hopes to win the PSDB's presidential nomination for 2006, and the polls show him as the strongest potential rival to a Lula seeking reelection (though the polls show Lula winning in any case).

Garotinho, Matheus and Campista have all announced that they intend to appeal their convictions. This means that the suit will most likely have to go through two higher instances before their sentences are either confirmed or dismissed. Contingency planning is already underway in the PSDB.

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Brazil's 'Anti-Lula' a Paragon of Political Incorrectness;  
Leftists cringe at quotes from Congress' leader, but the right sees him as a needed counterweight.

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DATELINE: BRASILIA, Brazil

Neptism is good. Homosexuality is bad. Getting pregnant through rape is a "horrible accident."

Severino Cavalcanti, the author of these sentiments, is on a roll. When he was but a lowly back-bench congressman, such public pronouncements might have earned him a passing sneer in a political column. Now that he's one of Brazil's most powerful men, Cavalcanti's controversial declarations have landed him on front pages across the country.

The politically incorrect lawmaker has commanded the spotlight since February, when he stunned just about everyone in Brazil with his election as president of the National Congress. His supporters in Congress rejoiced: He was one of their own, a man who might do them a few favors -- like giving them a pay raise, one of his chief promises when he campaigned for the leadership. But many in Brazil were mortified.

Depending on whom you talk to, Cavalcanti is either a champion of legislative independence or a career politician keen to advance the interests of career politicians. He's a paragon of conservative moral virtue, shaped by his devout Catholicism, or a buffoonish symbol of the retrograde forces holding Brazil back.

Everyone, however, agrees on one thing: Just months into his new office, Cavalcanti has become a headache for the government of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Soon after his election, the 74-year-old legislator from Brazil's depressed northeast forced the government to back down on a tax increase affecting mostly professionals and farmers. He demanded greater congressional control over the federal budget. He has threatened to challenge Lula's constitutionally allowed executive decrees.

"Severino is a national leader now," said Luciano Dias, a political consultant in Brasilia, the capital, who has worked with Cavalcanti's Progressive Party. "He was an obscure deputy from a backwater state. Now he's the man who's the anti-Lula."

As president of Congress, Cavalcanti wields power similar to that of the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, able to decide if or when legislation comes to a vote. Government-urged reforms of the central bank and trade unions are now at risk of being diluted, delayed or killed, analysts say -- setbacks that could complicate Lula's bid for reelection next year.

Many here say Lula has only himself to blame. Normally, the leader of Congress is a member of the president's party, but Lula chose as his candidate a left-wing deputy from his Workers' Party, or PT, who lacked strong relationships with legislators.

Already feeling slighted by the government's allegedly high-handed ways in handing out appointments and money, back-benchers revolted, electing Cavalcanti by a landslide in a humiliating defeat for the PT.

"The sin of the PT was arrogance, to think it was possible to impose a name on Congress," Dias said.

As his colleagues' standard-bearer, Cavalcanti has made increasing the authority of Congress and its power of patronage his battle cry. But blunders have mixed with victories. Public outrage forced him to abandon his effort to boost congressional salaries beyond \$7,600 a month in a country where the monthly minimum wage is \$120.

Observers say Cavalcanti also miscalculated when he demanded that Lula name a Progressive Party member to a ministerial post or face the faction's withdrawal from the government's coalition in Congress. Furious, Lula called his bluff. In the end, Cavalcanti backtracked and the Progressives remained in the coalition.

The aggressive tactics come as no surprise. "This is his style -- it always has been," said Andre Zacharow, a deputy from the Socialist Party. "He's no congressional neophyte."

Cavalcanti joined Congress in 1995 after spending 28 years in the Assembly of his home state, Pernambuco. He gained a reputation for championing small-business owners and opposition to abortion.

He is a strong supporter of the traditional family -- none more so than his own, say critics, noting that several Cavalcantis are on his payroll or hold other government jobs.

When he succeeded last month in installing his son as a federal agriculture official in Pernambuco, Cavalcanti dismissed charges of nepotism, describing those who complain as "losers who don't know how to raise their children." Congress has since begun deliberating several anti-nepotism measures.

Critics call Cavalcanti the epitome of many of the things wrong in Brazilian politics, a system that revolves around self-enrichment and patronage.

"On the one hand, he shows a bad side of Brazilian reality, of clientelism, nepotism and attending to private, personal interests," said Alberto Goldman, a deputy from the Social Democracy Party. But he said Cavalcanti was also "playing an important role in securing for Congress a level of independence, of autonomy, for which we've fought for years."

Social activists are appalled at many of Cavalcanti's conservative stands.

He has made derogatory comments about gays and lesbians; he reportedly once asked a gay activist in public about his sexual practices. This month, feminist groups were flabbergasted when Cavalcanti made his rape comment and advised impregnated victims to have their babies and raise them "with affection and love."

"For us, rape is a crime and not an accident," said Simone Diniz, founder of a women's health organization. Cavalcanti "contributes to backwardness and intolerance, even over and against Brazilian law, which is already very conservative."

Supporters acknowledge that Cavalcanti's views and public statements can be awkward. But they back his vision of a more powerful Congress and a humbler government.

Cavalcanti, said Dias, has "created an environment of negotiation that's very positive for ... deputies. Everyone can dream of holding power now."