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John Neagle

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Brazil: On Nov. 15 Presidential Election Returns

by John Neagle
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On Nov. 20, official returns from the Nov. 15 election based on a count of 99.3% of the ballots showed Fernando Collor de Mello of the conservative National Reconstruction Party with 28% of total. Luis Inacio da Silva (Lula) of the leftist Workers Party (PT) received 16.1% of the ballots, and Leonel Brizola, Democratic Labor Party (PDT), 15.5%. The rest of the votes were split among several candidates. The Dec. 17 runoff for the presidency will be a contest between Collor de Mello and da Silva. Collor de Mello’s major base of support came from big business and big landowners. Throughout his campaign, the candidate was rather vague on economic policy plans, with a platform based largely on combating government corruption. According to AP, many of Brazil’s poor the overwhelming majority voted for Collor de Mello, apparently because they liked his flashy good looks, and promises to remove overpaid and do-nothing public employees. Da Silva ran well in urban industrial regions, and received strong support among poor rural peasants in the north and northeast, who have traditionally voted as per instructions by conservative landowners. The PT candidate has called for an immediate moratorium on foreign debt interest payments, a large-scale agrarian reform program and a transfer of wealth from rich to poor via an expanded social services program paid for by the rich. In an interview with TV Globo on Nov. 19, Collor de Mello's top economic adviser, Zelia Cardoso de Mello, said that if elected in the runoff, Collor would launch a major restructuring of the public sector, including privatization and streamlining of administration. She pointed out that in 1989, the national government's fiscal deficit was equal to almost 8% of GDP, while foreign debt service payments have been virtually suspended. Cardoso said she was confident that a "national understanding" would emerge on price and wage levels in March 1990, when the new president is installed. State administration reforms are to include elimination of selected ministries, and the merger of other government bureaucracies. Cardoso justified Collor de Mello's proposal to "decentralize" foreign debt negotiations, by pointing out that not all Brazilian economic sectors are in decline. An example of the growth and profitability of certain private sector firms is Brazil’s expected 1989 trade surplus of $19 billion. Under Collor de Mello, said Cardoso, the national government would no longer act as the principal or exclusive negotiator of debt restructuring and terms with foreign creditors. (Basic data from Notimex, 11/19/89; AP, 11/20/89)

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