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Brazil: On Endorsements Of Conservative & Leftist Candidates In Dec. 17 Presidential Run-off

by John Neagle

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In the Nov. 15 presidential elections, no candidate obtained a majority of the vote, or 51%. The top two candidates will compete in a Dec. 17 runoff. They are conservative Fernando Collor de Mello of the National Reconstruction Party, and leftist Luis Inacio da Silva of the Workers Party (PT). The PT is part of a coalition, known as the Popular Brazil Front. Since the mid-November balloting, politicians, political parties, labor unions, civic organizations and religious groups have announced formal endorsements, or leaders' preferences. Some Catholic Church clergy, particularly those connected with the Christian base community movement or liberation theology, have described Collor de Mello as "the new representative of the old ruling classes." Da Silva is described as Brazilians' only hope against authoritarianism and further inequities suffered by the majority of citizens. In Brasilia, the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops officially urges clergypersons to follow the Vatican's demand for neutrality in the election. Meanwhile, the top three bishops in the conference hierarchy are known to favor da Silva. A document by the Conference read, "We are living a historic moment that will mark the future not only of Brazil but of Latin America...The victory of the Popular Brazil Front in the first round lifted our hopes." On Dec. 3, the six auxiliary bishops of Sao Paulo archdiocese were expected to declare their formal support for da Silva. According to Dominican friar Carlos Alberto Libanio Christo, in Sao Paulo, an estimated 80% of priests and nuns support the da Silva's candidacy. The friar wrote a biography on da Silva and advises him on religious issues. Collor has launched a counterattack to obtain religious support. Among other things, his campaign workers are planning to distribute at churches on Sundays 10 million brochures accusing da Silva's supporters of attempting to delete the phrase "protection of God" from the preamble of the country's constitution. Collor has visited the papal Nuncio in Brasilia to complain about the Church support for da Silva. On Dec. 1, daily newspaper O Globo reported that the Vatican's move to silence liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, a da Silva supporter, does not go into effect until January, two weeks after the runoff. Boff has asserted that Collor "plans to maintain the hegemony of the ruling class." On Nov. 30, the General Workers Confederation (CGT) publicly endorsed Collor for president. CGT president Antonio Rogerio Magri said, "We want a modern and open country, and a guarantee for new foreign investments." The CGT's rival confederation, the Workers United Central (Central Unico dos Trabalhadores-CUT), has expressed support for da Silva. According to Magri, the CUT has confused trade union activism with party politics. He added that the CGT is not linked to Collor's party, but supports the candidate's campaign platform. Magri told reporters that the CUT is "sectarian, narrow, and xenophobic." He added that the Central has created problems not only for foreign capital but also for expanded investments by domestic private capital. CUT president Jair Meneguelli has announced his support for da Silva. He added that trade unions under the CUT "are free" to make their own decisions about the two candidates. Several cabinet ministers have publicly announced their intent to vote for, and lend support to Collor. Collor apparently believes that his image needs to be shifted to the center-left. Consequently, he has publicly rejected the endorsement of certain well-known conservative politicians, and important business groups, including the Sao Paulo State Federation of

Industries. Recently, the Brazilian Society for Defense of Tradition, Family and Property (Sociedade Brasileira para Defesa da Tradicao, Familia e Propriedade) published its endorsement of Collor in Brazil's major newspapers. The Society played a major role in laying the groundwork for the 1964 military coup. In response to the Society's announcement, Collor's spokesperson Claudio Humberto Rosa said, "The conservatism of the Society is incompatible with the modernity defended by the candidate of the Party of National Reconstruction." (Basic data from Notimex, 11/30/89, 12/01/89; New York Times, 12/03/89)

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