

Brazil's President Temer Escapes More Charges as Committee Votes in His Favor



Brasilia, October 20 (RHC)-- A Brazilian congressional committee has voted 39-26 to reject charges against President Michel Temer stemming from a corruption case involving the world's largest meatpacker. The full lower house of Congress still must vote on the charges but is expected to shelve them next week, sparing Temer from trial by the Supreme Court for alleged obstruction of justice and membership in a criminal organization. He had been accused of taking bribes and condoning the payment of hush money to a jailed politician in testimony by the businessman Joesley Batista.

Temer has denied any wrongdoing and his lawyers argued that the case against him was flawed because it was based on an inconclusive recording that Batista secretly made of a conversation with the president. The lower chamber decides whether a Brazilian president can be put on trial. Two-thirds of its members must vote to approve a charge for it to move forward, a hurdle his opponents are not expected to clear.

Temer survived an earlier corruption charge in the lower house in August in connection with the same graft scheme in which prosecutors accused him of arranging to receive a total of US\$11.8 million in bribes from JBS SA. During the debate, the opposition Congressman Alessandro Molon, of the center-left

Sustainability Network party, said Temer was part of a criminal organization that collected bribes. He accused the president of taking part in decisions on how the money was distributed.

Workers Party lawmakers called for Temer to stand trial, saying the charges against him were more serious than those leveled at his predecessor Dilma Rousseff, who was impeached last year for a lesser crime of violating budget rules -- a charge she denies. But Temer's allies argued that the charges should be thrown out because the country needs Temer to serve out his mandate through the end of 2018 for political and economic stability.

Temer, embroiled in a number of other corruption charges, is the most unpopular Brazilian leader since the country's dictatorship, which lasted from 1964 to 1985. According to a recent survey, his popularity has plummeted down to 3 percent.

Since he was appointed president, he has pushed through a series of neo-liberal reforms, which have been widely condemned by women's groups, Indigenous organizations, labor unions and environmental activists.

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