

Brazil's Senate advances legislation that might send Lula back to prison



Brasilia, December 12 (RHC)-- Brazil's Senate has taken a step toward restoring mandatory imprisonment for convicts after they lose their first appeal, a move that could return former leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva to jail for corruption.

The Senate's constitution and justice committee voted 22-1 for an amendment that would permanently fix a judicial rule that is seen to be crucial in ending impunity due to drawn-out lawsuits and a huge backlog in court cases.

Last month, the Brazilian Supreme Court, in a 6-5 decision, overturned a three-year-old rule that established sending convicted criminals to prison after losing their first appeal and cutting short endless processes.

That November 7th ruling allowed Lula to obtain his release the next day, pending appeals against two convictions for corruption. Businessmen convicted of paying bribes and kickbacks in the so-called Car Wash corruption scandal were also freed.

Lula's release angered supporters of President Jair Bolsonaro and that prompted right-wing lawmakers to advance bills to restore a stricter rule on appeals.

"This vote resulted from the growing awareness of the issue among lawmakers, to the relief of many Brazilians," said Senator Lasier Martins, author of the bill. He urged senators to put the bill to a vote in the Senate plenary this week so that the lower chamber can deal with it before the year is over.

But the house has its own bill going through committee debates that is more likely to make the statute books because it seeks the same outcome by changing the penal code instead of amending the constitution and needs fewer votes to get approved.

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