

Sleepless Nights and Starry Skies

The World Cup in Brasil and international surges of insurrection

May 22, 2014

THE World Cup is not about football. If a country becomes a candidate for organizing this event, it is because football absolves the same function today as the spectacle of the gladiators did in ancient Rome, and because it is a golden opportunity for the managerial State to extend its economic development and political influence by leaps and bounds. The Cup incurs a monstrous cost, however the returns on investment will almost certainly be juicy. Brasil, considered one of the world's major economic powers, is counting on moving up the echelons by organizing the Cup and the Olympic Games.

The World Cup is also a project of power to bridle social tensions and worship the spectacle. For State bodies and economic interests, it is an opportunity to create the conditions to open up new markets, put an end to certain kinds of resistance and achieve a qualitative leap in the occupation of the territory and capitalist exploitation. This is the modern High Mass of the State and Capital, where the arrogance of power is exhibited in the spectacle of the stadiums, the howling masses, screens, live broadcasts and national pride.

The granting of the organization of the 2014 World Cup to the Brazilian State has meant an immediate systematic intensification of the management of "social peace." New police units, the Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora (UPP), have emerged, created along the model of the infamous "pacification operations" implanted since 2008 in dozens of tough neighbourhoods and favelas of Rio de Janeiro. The State has regained military control of the neighbourhoods in the name of the war on drug trafficking. According to official figures more than 5,500 people have been killed by police in Rio de Janeiro alone in the space of four years. In neighbourhoods where gangs of traffickers have been hunted down, the paramilitaries are now calling the shots.

But the World Cup obviously does not only have the uniformed side to it. For a sum exceeding 3500 million dollars, stadiums have been built in strategic points of the cities. Favelas have been evicted and razed to the ground to build new middle class neighbourhoods, shopping centres, luxury hotels and beach facilities. The transport axis and motorways have been redeveloped and secured; airports, ports and electricity networks have been built or rebuilt. In Rio de Janeiro 250,000 people have been evicted from their homes to make way for construction projects related to the World Cup 2014 and the 2016 Olympic Games. Brazilian Justice has not concealed its intentions about its plans for the future of all these stadiums most of which will only accommodate a few games: studies are underway to examine how the new stadiums in Manaus, Brasilia, Cuiabá and Natal could be turned into prisons.

The World Cup is therefore an operation of social cleansing. The State and Capital are getting rid of the undesirables, the segments of the population that have become superfluous in commodity circulation and can only become sources of unrest. All the same it would be a mistake to consider this operation an “exception” that democracies legitimize through the World Cup: it is well and truly a restructuring and intensification of social control and exploitation. World Cup or crisis, war or reconstruction, natural disasters or emergencies... power has us dangling from “emergency situations” that are in fact the very core of capitalist and State progress.

The World Cup ceremony opens up every conceivable market. And this does not only concern real estate speculation or the security industry. For months farmers have been reporting that trucks full of cocaine have been coming and going from Colombia to meet the “needs” of the three million tourists expected. Just as happened during the World Cup in South Africa in 2010, prostitution will grow vertiginously. On the construction sites of the stadiums numerous immigrant workers work under particularly hard conditions, the companies flogging them in order to meet deadlines. Not to mention the different power factions in Brasil that are negotiating and entering into agreements with the government: the drug gangs are taking care of the dirty work of expelling people who resist the urbanization programs too much, whereas the paramilitaries are employed by companies to ensure security on construction sites and to crush strikes and protests through blackmail and murder.

But the new order of things is not just this horror. The new order of things is how in June 2013 Brasil was in flames for almost a month. What began as a movement against an increase in the price of bus tickets turned into uncontrolled widespread revolt against power. Since that month of revolt there have been more and more conflicts around the evictions, resistance against austerity plans, protests against police killings, or even antipatriotic disorders such as on the national holiday of 7

September etc., which have degenerated and escaped the control of classical political mediation. Over the past few months a social imagination has been created in Brasil that could set the streets alight again.

While power and its contenders are trying to stop the wave of uprisings in Syria and the revolts that are infecting more and more areas of the world, drowning them in a pool of blood; while in Greece the population has been oppressed and terrorized to erase the memory of the uprising of December 2008; while in Ukraine, an uprising of the people sees itself trampled by a macabre game between different fractions of power; while in Egypt, Turkey, Bosnia, Libya, etc.. order seems to be reorganizing and re-establishing itself, the World Cup in Brasil presents itself as an attempt to put the social contradictions that are traversing Latin America in a straight jacket.

Taking different forms according to the various contexts and conditions, a restructuring of Capital and the State is underway everywhere in the world. National boundaries are revealing themselves to be more than ever what they have always been: fences and walls to manage the potential revolt of the disinherited. So it is no coincidence if in the face of the obvious contagion between the various revolts of the past few years – a contagion not so much based on similar conditions, but rather on a new non-mediated imagination of the possibility to rise up, of another life – the State is playing on nationalism and reactionary sentiments: from fascist movements in ascension in the European continent to the revival of patriotism in countries that experienced “the Arab spring”, or the cheap anti-imperialism of former leaders like Chavez, right to the fever for national football teams.

But instead of going into the movements of international reaction further, let us rather look at those of revolt and the possibilities they are opening up. During the revolt of June 2013 in Brasil, the rebels shouted, “after Greece after Turkey now it is Brasil’s turn! ” The revolts that we have known in recent years have opened the way to putting an end to here and there. Links between national States on the question of repression have certainly been reinforced at breakneck speed, but that should neither surprise nor frighten us. Given growing social instability and the total intermingling of economies and State systems, one can imagine that when something happens in one place, it could also have consequences elsewhere. And this movement is already in act in the imagination, this particularly fertile ground for rebellion. It is now time to introduce this imagination into our projects of struggle and to seize the opportunities that arise.

There is no such thing as a science of insurrection. Many recent examples – from the riots in London in 2011 to the uprisings in the Arab world – show us the unpredictable character of insurrection. The pretexts might even be quite “trivial”. This

unpredictability, however, should not push us into a waiting position for the “next one” somewhere in the world; rather it affirms the need for permanent conflictuality, a preparation in ideas and acts. This is the only way we can hope to not find ourselves unprepared at such moments: it matters little where one is on the planet, one can attempt to give qualitative contributions to pushing the revolts in course in a radically emancipatory direction, making them strike the fundamental structures of modern dominion and its reproduction, the structures that find themselves behind the rows of cops and façades of banks. Emphasis on the unpredictability of insurrection does not mean to say that it fell from the skies. It is fair to say that there may be tensions pointing to increasing opportunities for revolt, but there is no certainty that these will become reality. Conversely, there could be situations or conflicts that give no glimpse of the next outbreak of rebellion at all, yet blow the lid off things. However, the unpredictability of insurrection should not be a serious problem for anarchists who are continuously clashing with authority, it is a serious problem for the State. If we look at the massive investments in control and law enforcement that are being made internationally, it does not appear that the State is completely unaware of this weak point.

Insurrection is a game of unprecedented connections and unanticipated acts. It is not mathematics where numbers provide the final solution. It is not a matter of “external solidarity” applauding the revolt of others. Each context and each moment offers different possibilities and opportunities. Anarchists must give themselves analysis, knowledge and means to go on the offensive and attack.

One should also seek to learn insurrectional experiences, in one’s analyses as well as in one’s practices. Dominion’s time is moving faster and faster, blurring the memory of revolts. Insurrections are not the social revolution and should not be seen as steps in a linear development towards social revolution. Rather they are transient moments of rupture during which time and space escape the grip of power. Given the intensification of repression – the fact that authority is always ready to drown the uprising of the oppressed in blood – and the apparent confusion of the motivations of the many people in contemporary times of rebellion, some shrink from the insurrectionary perspective. And yet. It is precisely insurrection that is breaking the grip of control and repression in a world where mass extermination and organized killing are now the daily routine of State and Capital. It is precisely insurrection that is capable of creating the space for translating rejection and revolt into clearer and more assertive ideas. Fear of the unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of insurrection is not only found on the side of order, but also among the revolutionaries who seek salvation in the repetition of old political recipes: instead of attacking everywhere and all the time, the building of a unified revolutionary movement; instead of insurrection, the gradual development of a “counter-power”; instead of the necessary destruction, the illusion of a progressive

change of attitudes. We then see the anarchists taking the role of the moribund left or former insurgents in search of certainties ranting on the “proletariat as historical subject” or starting to read Lenin to find recipes for a “victorious revolution”. Yet recent insurrectional experiences all point to the need to find other roads, roads that separate themselves radically and permanently from any “political” vision of social war.

The classical revolutionary perspective of self management is dead. It is time to finally take notice and put an end to attempts to revive it in other words and in other forms. No structure of capital or the State can be taken to be used in an emancipatory way; no social category is in essence a carrier of a project of social transformation; no defensive battle will transform itself into a revolutionary offensive. The contemporary paradox lies in the fact that on the one hand, insurrection needs a dream of freedom to give it oxygen to persevere and on the other, its work must necessarily be totally destructive to have any hope of going beyond extinction and crystallization. Insurrection is necessary to open the path to individual and social liberation; and it is the vitamins of utopia that force undreamed of horizons in order to escape from the social prison. It is from the confluence of insurrectionary practice and ideas of freedom that a contemporary revolutionary perspective could arise.

The destructive nature of insurrection leads to the destruction of the edifice of the social prison we all live in. It is necessary to study and analyze where its walls, guards, watchtowers are today if we intend to strike them. Modern domination has disseminated structures that enable the reproduction of the social prison everywhere. Think of the ubiquitous technological infrastructures that attach each and every one of us to the role of prisoner without having visible chains as such. Or how capitalist accumulation is basically moving towards circulation. In Europe at least, exploitation is no longer concentrated in huge bastions as before, but has spread and decentralized, encompassing every aspect of life. The connections between these aspects are guaranteed by paths, cables, pipelines, railways, underground pipes that represent the veins of dominion. We will certainly not be the last to howl with joy if insurgents set fire to the parliament anywhere in the world, but the anarchists’ contribution to the social war without doubt also consist of pointing to and attacking how and where authority feeds and reproduces itself more specifically.

But destruction is not enough. Deed and thought must go hand in hand. We cannot hope to pull down the walls of the social prison if we are not already trying to look beyond the walls towards unknown horizons, no matter how difficult. You can’t think freely in the shadow a church. That’s true. But the church is not just a building, it is the realization of social relations and dominant ideologies. It is in desiring what these relations and ideologies don’t offer, what they erase from the

imagination, whose very possibility to be thought is suppressed, that we will find ourselves at daggers drawn with the existent. We have no need for yet another programme to planning the transformation of the world, nor alternative experiences that would plant the seeds of anarchy of tomorrow. No! What we lack is the projection of ourselves into a completely other environment, dreams. Only leaving behind us the realism that claims a new coat of paint for our cells, longer walks, more activities ... can we hope to start dreaming again, give words to our desires, these essential words to express and communicate a revolutionary perspective. The world gives a glimpse of what can be done, we must do what cannot be done. Find an anarchist ethical tension towards what surrounds us again, the spearhead of our struggle for freedom. Not let anti-authority degenerate into a political posture, but make it burn as something that animates us daily, something that intoxicates us with desires, uncontrollable in thought as in deed. Continue starting from the individual, to the autonomous individuality capable of reflecting, dreaming and acting, always and everywhere, during moments of social unrest and bloody reaction, against the winds and tides of conformity and strategic evaluations. The heart of such an impetuous anarchism is also the nucleus of future revolutionary perspectives.

Nobody has any doubts any more. Nor does the State. The World Cup in Brasil will not go ahead smoothly, just as all the social cleansing projects in the countries of the Amazon have come up against unexpected resistance that will not let itself be disarmed easily. The Brazilian government has allowed itself to announce that it will mobilize 160,000 police and military to maintain order during the high mass, reinforced by tens of thousands of private security guards in training all over the world at this very moment. Each State is accentuating its propaganda for its national team and preparing for the massive influx of tourists and foreign exchange, the other side of the capitalist war. They are preparing us for a global tribute to power and the crushing of revolt.

The World Cup is materializing in a number of fields which are all possible avenues of attack. In the neighbourhoods of the Brazilian cities, it is taking the form of the militarised urban cleansing carried out by international construction companies, architects offices from all over and the mastodons of technology. National emblems will flood the streets, commercial sponsors will bombard the whole planet with advertisements, the media will ensure live programmes of the spectacle of alienation. Security companies and consultancies are hammering on the gates of the authorities with modern models of anti-insurgency combat in the necropoli, while a tight mesh of communication technologies permits diversified control.

The machinery of the World Cup is made up of countless cogs that are closely connected and interdependent: it's for everyone, all over the world, to consider what wheels are likely to disrupt and paralyse the machinery.

"Não vai ter Copa." Many rebels in Brasil are preparing to transform the World Cup into a nightmare for the State and a torch of insurrection for lovers of freedom. This torch should not only burn in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paolo or Porto Alegre, let's seize the opportunity to illuminate the darkness of dominion everywhere.

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