

Interview

Brazil: The Giant is Waking Up

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1) Why are the recent protests in Brazil something new ?

Despite all the big changes in Brazil over the last years, what is still missing is a true social change! This conformism which has haunted the country for a long time has to go, the people have to revolt, go to the street, protest – but nothing of this sort had been done before, the Brazilian continued his day on the sofa, watching Novelas and complaining each time a protest arises that it will make him be late to work. But corruption was always present, just as much as sleeping children in the street has been a normal part of our everyday life. Hospitals in Brazil have still always had a lack of medicine, equipment, and places.

Overall, Brazil is a conservative country. The values of Brazil are still the same as fifty years ago and the old Brazilian thinks like he did in his youth – and a large part of the youth of today thinks the same way as well, unfortunately. I read an article the other day that said all of the recent protests have given back the ability to dream to those older generations who had forgotten how to do it : dream of a better country, of social justice, of equality for all.

These protests started with the bus fare increase of 20 cents and was organized by the the movement Passe livre (Free fare movement). It developed step by step (a bit like in Turkey, which started with a simple demonstration for a park and ended up in a movement demanding the removal of the prime minister) – into a social movement that no one had seen coming! These 20 cents were the drop that finally spilled the cup.

2) How do the protesters organize ?

How did they actually get started ? Another time : Facebook ! It’s the tool, the tripping device, of social movements (I won’t go up to the point to draw a direct line between the Arab Spring and this Brazilian Spring in Winter but the principle is the same). Through Facebook, everyone shares information on the protests, even the central slogans on the signs are chosen through Facebook groups with the option to make a survey etc. Also, Facebook has become an important tool to pass videos of police violence along, to share advice on how to protect oneself against tear gas, how to reach doctors or lawyers.

3) What is the role of the police in the development of the movement?

What is funny and another time very comparable to Turkey is the fact that the police aggression is the actual source of all of these demonstrations. Brazil has a fascist police, corrupted and badly trained, especially for situations like these, up to the point that people in the streets call Brazil a dictatorship (in Rio they call it "Ditadura Paes," after the prefect of the Rio region, Eduardo Paes). The protests had, at the beginning, a pacifist strategy and, in principle, still do today but the numerous cases of police violence against the protestors have just re-affirmed their case and given reason to more and more people to not only demand the decrease of public transport fares but also to get involved to change the whole country, which, despite the general belief, still works very badly for most. Look at the videos from Rio or São Paulo and you will see the absurdity of the scenes, the unnecessary force used by the military police, the aggressions against journalists, who are there to do their job but end up being shot with rubber bullets and tear gas grenades. Numerous journalists have been injured and hundreds of people arrested.

What's curious is that a large part of the arrests were made on the 4th day of protest when the cops had the order to arrest all people who were carrying vinegar – a useful tool against the effects of tear gas – in their backpacks or pockets! The absurdity of the situation, the fact that people get arrested for the possession of vinegar – please!) has been widely commented in the media and the response of the people lived up to the same level of absurdity as police and government: they organized a "Marcha para legalização do Vinagre" (a parody of the "Marcha para legalização da maconha" for the legalization of cannabis).

4) What social class is pushing the protest forward?

The rich really don't care about this question since the public transport system is almost not used by them at all and the poor do not have any time to lose for such questions either, since watching a football match is still a thousand times more important than going to the street to defend one's rights. Marx said that religion is the opium of the people – in Brazil, it's football. So it's the middle class that actually defends the civic rights of Brazilians but it's not always easy. On one side, you face the manipulative media (O Globo, Rede Record, etc.) and on the other side, you have a conformist population who is not interested in political life. They still try to do their best, showing that one can change a country, and that they want the peace, which has been destroyed multiple times by the military police. Humour is very present in their banners and chants and many people bring flowers to the protests to give them to policemen as a symbol of peace.

5) What can we expect for the time to come?

I don't have an answer to this, and I don't think there are many specialist who actually do. The days of action against the fare increase continue, the next one is June 17 and more and more people will be there. Even if the fare increase will not be taken back, at least Brazil will have understood one thing: the people have the power – a power they did not know about but one that becomes more and more present in the mentality of young Brazilians. One cannot foresee how a government could possibly counteract such a process because if a country of more than 200 million people is waking up, that's going to make noise, a lot of noise. So for once, in a long time, the Brazilian people has an actual reason to be proud of itself.

P.S.

* From Truth is a Beaver:

<http://truthisabeaver.blog.com/2013/06/17/brazil-protests/>