

# **The June 2013 Uprisings in Brazil**

CrimethInc.

July 27, 2013

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## Part I. Timeline of Events

In June 2013, immediately on the heels of the uprising in Turkey, Brazil erupted in nationwide turmoil. Beginning with protests against a public transit fare increase, this upheaval brought hundreds of thousands to the streets in open fighting with the police. The fare increase was soundly defeated, in one of the few victories of the past several years of global revolts. But the movement was a victim of its own success, as middle-class nationalists and pacifists joined in, clashing with other protesters and muddying the issues.

Although anarchists played a decisive role in these events, very little material about the upheaval has appeared in English from Brazilian anarchists. To correct this, we have solicited our comrades' perspectives from inside the riots. This is the first of two collectively authored texts analyzing the conditions that produced the uprising and the lessons we can draw from it. We will publish the second shortly.

*The opinions, analysis, gossip, conspiracy, and witchcraft expressed herein do not purport to represent all the groups and positions in the uprisings that occurred throughout Brazil in June 2013. We do not want to erase the power of difference, the capillary plurality and molecular diversity of experiences, tactics, and political perspectives. We do not want to impose a final analysis on the uprisings. These analyses reflect only the critical perspective of an anonymous, rhizomatic grupelho (faction) active in the uprisings of Goiânia, Pôrto Alegre, Belo Horizonte, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. We hope to describe what occurred from a radical, anti-hegemonic, and subaltern point of view. We also aspire to convey a bit of the magic from the streets, barricades, favelas, and prisons of Bra\$il, to fuel the ongoing struggles in Turkey, Egypt, Chile, Greece, Spain, Italy, the USA, and elsewhere in the Globalitarian Empire.*

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In São Paulo, the first demonstration of this new wave of revolt against the transit fare increase took place on June 6, 2013. The fare had been increased by 20 cents. This meant that a single transit cost a third of the Brazilian minimum wage, forcing some workers to skip lunch to afford it. The MPL (Movimento pelo Passe Livre: Free Pass Movement) had called the June 6 demonstration far in advance to protest the fare increase; a relatively wide coalition backed it, including left-wing and center-left parties, social movements, and the student movement. The most radical groups anticipated it with fear and excitement: fear that the parties might get traction in the movement, and excitement about the participation of the popular classes<sup>1</sup> and more radical groups. The demonstration in São Paulo occurred in the wake of street clashes with police a few weeks earlier in Pôrto Alegre and Goiânia, in weekly mass demonstrations, bringing not only more radical sectors but also popular and poor strata to the streets.

The first demonstration in São Paulo fulfilled expectations. About 5000 people took to the streets. Leaving from the Viaduto do Chá across from the city hall of São Paulo, the march passed by the most important avenues of the city. From the first moment, graffiti appeared all over the walls; dumpsters were dragged into the street and burned, disrupting and distracting the military police. Within an hour, a confrontation with police erupted that lasted until the end of the demonstration. The police attacked with tear gas, pepper spray, and stun grenades. The demonstrators retaliated with projectiles and erected burning barricades of trash and subway turnstiles. After this battle, the demonstration proceeded to Paulista Avenue (one of the city's

busiest and most important streets), closing it in both directions. Again, garbage burned in the streets. Shops, corporate franchises, banks, and subway stations were transformed by means of paint and projectiles. The losses inflicted to the São Paulo subway were estimated at US \$40,000 that day.

São Paulo had not seen such fierce demonstrations since the protests against the Free Trade Area of the Americas negotiations over a decade before. Another demonstration was scheduled for the next day.

The same spirit marked this demonstration: graffiti on the walls, destruction of the symbols of global capitalism. Once again, the police attacked; once more, the protesters responded. A new street battle began with the police employing tear gas, bombs, and batons, and protesters defending themselves with stones, barricades, and homemade bombs. A third protest in the same mold was scheduled for the following day.

The protesters of São Paulo had a few days of rest after this three-day marathon; another demonstration was scheduled for June 13. This one started around 6 pm in the square Ramos de Azevedo, in the center of the city. Protesters gathered there from 5 pm on. The group went to the square of the Republic, then walked along Ipiranga Avenue to the street of Consolação, at the corner of Roosevelt Square.

Now it was a whole new ball game. The previous week's demonstrations had attracted more people, and this demo was attended by more than 10,000. Police appeared at the outskirts of Paulista Avenue, trying to block the demonstration to defend the interests of big business, who feared new reprisals from the enraged population. Riot police made a cordon and began to bombard the demonstration. Again, the manifestation retaliated with stones, built barricades, and destroyed targets associated with global capitalism.

This time, the police were stopping and searching people on the subway; even before the beginning of the demonstration, they detained more than 40 people. By the end of the evening, almost 250 had been arrested. This was clearly an attempt to criminalize and intimidate the movement by means of conspiracy charges and absurd bail costs (R\$20,000).

Another new aspect of this demonstration was the molecularization of the revolt. As riot police increased repression, the demonstration began to dissolve naturally into small groups of 300 to 1000. These initiated new demonstrations and points of conflict all around the city center. Guerrilla battles broke out everywhere as protesters retreating from bomb-throwing police built barricades.

The anticipation building up to the fifth major demonstration was intense. It was called for June 17. The media was buzzing. GLoBo—the biggest TV company of Brazil and one of the world's biggest—interrupted their programming to disseminate news about the demonstrations. Initially, the corporate media depicted the movement as a bunch of criminals; then, when it gained momentum, they began to make a distinction between peaceful protesters and vandals in an attempt to marginalize the more radical sectors.

Yet once again, the demonstration assumed a radical character. Large banks, chain stores, and department stores were beautified with graffiti; protesters nearly overran the headquarters of the state government of São Paulo, the Palácio dos Bandeirantes; busses were vandalized...

We had known that the commotion about the Military Police beating photographers, reporters, and protesters would attract a large mass—and that came true. About 50,000 people attended this demonstration. Now what we had feared was finally happening: the demonstration included the middle class, the opportunist parties, a few nationalist groups, and the extreme right wing.

The middle class had bought the hetero-bourgeois media discourse: they called for pacifism, marching with Brazilian flags and singing the national anthem. The right wing was trying to take over the movement, bringing their own agenda: protesting “corruption” and calling for President Dilma to be impeached. This was the first demonstration in which there were reports of pacifist protesters attacking radical groups. Anarchists who were spray painting in a bank were attacked by nationalists and pacifists and forced to withdraw. Chants of “no violence” directed at the police turned into chants of “without vandalism” directed at the protesters. The game had changed again.

Meanwhile, in Rio de Janeiro, thousands of people took to the streets the same day. Drawing on the momentum from São Paulo, a demonstration that would otherwise have drawn only a few thousand people drew over 100,000—making it the largest street demonstration in Brazil for 20 years. The starting point was on the square of the Candelária. The mass occupied the Rio Branco Avenue and marched toward the square of the Municipal Theater.

Knowing that the parties wanted to end the demonstration in Candelária, a group of anarchists, insurrectionists, anarcho-feminists, and Maoists were able to pull the manifestation to ALERJ, the parliament of Rio de Janeiro. The scene was already chaotic when the crowd arrived there. A small group of military police had attempted to guard a barricade in front of the building; surrounded and attacked, they fled into the ALERJ. Some protesters tried to invade the ALERJ; others spray painted its walls and broke its windows; still others began to burn cars. Several groups fanned out into the surrounding area to attack banks and multinational stores; other groups started looting, distributing the goods and playing with them in the streets. For over three hours, the center of Rio de Janeiro was filled with protesters.

From that day on, the demonstrations spread throughout the country. Pôrto Alegre returned to star in street clashes. Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro staged new mass protests; during the Confederations Cup, protesters torched several car dealerships in Belo Horizonte and protesters from Rio de Janeiro came within 500 meters of the Maracanã during the final game, advancing more than two kilometers past the perimeter established by FIFA. Rio de Janeiro witnessed the greatest demonstration in the history of Brazil, over 3 million people, including an hours-long pitched battle in which protesters clashed with the BOPE (Assault Troop of Rio de Janeiro Military Police) and chased away the Caveirão—“BigSkull,” BOPE’s tank for going into the slums to kill poor and black people.

The people of Vitória also fought major battles, occupying the Terceira Ponte—the most important bridge of the city. In Salvador, the demonstrations became a great deal more radical, drawing broad participation especially from the poorest sectors of society. There were demonstrations in the cities around São Paulo: Campinas, Santos, Praia Grande, Sorocaba—and around Rio de Janeiro: Barra Mansa, Macaé, Campos—and in other large cities such as Curitiba, Florianópolis, Natal, Maceio, and Aracaju. At the end of June, there were days when there were protests in more than 100 cities at once, and cities like São Paulo, Pôrto Alegre, Belo Horizonte, and Rio de Janeiro had protests every day of the week. Not to mention the international solidarity protests that took place in Berlin, Barcelona, and London.

On June 19, thanks to all the burned busses, smashed banks, and destroyed shop fronts, the governments of Rio and São Paulo jointly announced the reduction of the transit fare. This was a transparent ploy to preserve what little popularity they had left, meeting the movement’s demands before things got further out of control. This had a domino effect: soon after, several major cities also announced fare reductions, making this a historic victory. Yet more demonstrations

still ensued. These focused on additional issues such as private mafia control of transportation. Belo Horizonte, Pôrto Alegre, and Vitória joined in, with protesters occupying the Legislative Chamber. In Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, protesters continued to fill the streets. Several public university offices in São Paulo and Belo Horizonte are occupied as of this writing, and we just been informed that Paulínia, in the state of São Paulo, is the first city to adopt Rate Zero after the protests: free passage on public transportation.

**The movement against rising transportation costs is not new—it has been around for some years. Three years ago, it seemed to be one of the only urban movements involving mass conflict with the state. Why was that movement so lively when others seemed lifeless? And what was its role in setting off these recent larger struggles?**

The Movimento pelo Passe Livre (Free Pass Movement) has existed since 2005. The movement arose out of major uprisings against the fare increases that had occurred in Florianópolis and Salvador. The MPL gained a disproportionate role due to stupidity of the bourgeois media, which searches for leaders and martyrs for any social struggle, embracing whatever is simplest and most marketable. The MPL is usually just another group that participates in combative forums against rising rates in the cities that have more militant struggles over transportation issues.

These movements against rising rates have never been mass movements. In general, they are composed from the militant student movement, former students who are public school teachers, and high school students: mostly white, middle-class, heterosexual cis-men, in their overwhelming majority belonging to parties of the center-left social Democrats and Trotskyists, but also including a current of anarchists and autonomists. From the founding of the MPL until today, the protests that took place against the fare increases involved 3000 participants at the very maximum. Also, the movement did not have a radical character. Even with the participation of anarchists, the movement never managed to defend itself from police attacks, let alone begin an offensive against capitalism and the state. Its demonstrations were often marches carrying banners and drumming; when repression came, these were immediately dispersed, with rare exceptions.

In addition, there were other radical urban movements. One of the few breaths of life in recent years was the organization of the homeless and the movement of urban occupations—squats involving poor, black, and queer people. They established important social occupations across the country and bravely resisted the attacks of the state. The campaign against the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam also gained nationwide support, drawing thousands of people to the streets and inspiring urban militants to join indigenous peoples in the Amazon in committing acts of resistance and sabotage against Belo Monte.

**Explain how the uprising spread from a few specific single issues and particular groups to the participation of many parts of the general population with a broader outlook.**

Insurrectionary situations always exceed teleological interpretation; any attempt to explain them that does not take this into account is limited to a cis-masculinist rationality and Eurocentric totalitarian reason. That said, a variety of factors have contributed to this political cauldron.

The brave popular resistance in pitched battles around the country and the brutal police violence against demonstrators generated a social upheaval, bringing a large contingent of people to the streets. The arrival of these new protesters with little political background changed the situation. While the existing the movement radicalized in response to police repression, pacifists and nationalists attracted many of the newcomers, altering the character of the protests. In this context, extreme right-wing groups saw an opportunity to gain visibility.

The crisis of the state in Brazil has discredited all political and social representation, including professional politicians and left-wing parties. Much of the population attended demonstrations expressing this disillusionment. The right wing would channel this into campaigns against corruption, calls for the impeachment of president, and appeals in defense of the family.

The political context of Brazil is extremely turbulent; movements offer a strategic link to the strengthening of the collective interests of groups in resistance. The negative impact of the World Cup in Brazil is already visible, and in mass demonstrations during the Confederations Cup, the voices of those who are being affected by these developments echoed in the streets, especially in cities that hosted those events. The evictions of urban occupations and policies targeting favelas are also proceeding at full speed, which also contributed momentum. The movements of black people and people of color and grassroots organizations from the favelas brought a focus on police violence and state terrorism against black youth and slum dwellers. There is also a cis-heterosexist and masculinist assault in Brazil, with religious politicians trying to implement a law criminalizing women who have abortions, and another calling for psychologists to “heal” people guilty of anti-heteronormal gender disobedience. So the voices of all kinds of feminists, women, gays, trans-people, and queer-folks also echoed in the streets across the country.

One of the slogans of the uprising was “The giant woke up.” The participation of marginalized sectors including black people, favela dwellers, and trans-folks showed that the police who were violent downtown, with rubber bullets against rich and heterosexual protesters, were the same ones who kill poor, black, and non-heterosexual people in the slums every day. Slogans began to appear like “The Favela never slept,” “Feminists and trans-peoples never slept,” putting the movement in historical context rather than catering to the privilege of a disoriented middle class that always assumes itself to be the protagonist.

For more context, we can highlight the killing of eleven residents of Favela da Maré in Rio. In a demonstration of Maré residents, the police charged some people with robbery. Soon after, the police carried out a military operation in the Favela da Maré, killing eleven villagers. This produced a national uproar, strengthening the struggle of residents and politicized further demonstrations in Rio. Here is our solidarity with the families and residents of Maré and all those who live with violence every day, where direct action, radicalism, and fury in the streets reflect the realities of life on the margins of hetero-capitalism and the need to resort to such tactics as a survival strategy.

### **How did the politics shift as the uprising became more popular?**

Already, before the events in São Paulo and Rio, the very first protests in Pôrto Alegre and Goiânia were fierce. The news was that protesters were closing streets with burning tires and barricades, that they were burning busses, that the government was scared and retreating and that the police were violent, trapping many people and giving rise to lawsuits. Balaclavas, Molotov cocktails, gas masks, vinegar, voluntary medical staff, gasoline, and all types of handmade

bombs were deployed in almost all the demonstrations around the country, and not only by traditionally radical and insurrectionary groups. Tactics such as occupying government offices, blocking the doors of city hall, blockading roads, clashing with police, and looting became commonplace. The way the police reacted with violence and then retreated in fear only radicalized the demonstrators, creating a spirit of solidarity with arrested or injured protesters and revealing the power of horizontal grassroots organization.

On the other hand, the victory of the fare reduction, the end of the Confederations Cup, and the appearance of middle-class, nationalist, and pacifist sectors in the movement generated a period of decline in some cities. In São Paulo, in late June, black bloc'ers and other radical protesters were repeatedly beaten up by pacifists and handed over to police. Although the protests in Rio remained quite radical, anarchists and other protesters suffered aggression from Marxist and workerist parties.

Overall, the victories won by insurrectionary tactics offered a breath of hope to the vast majority that took to the streets. The fare increase was repealed, the aforementioned law of “gay healing” was tabled, a bill offering impunity to parliamentarians was vetoed. In cities where there was a pacifist breakthrough, it is necessary to revise the tactics and reorganize the fight, but the feeling in the air is that militant tactics fit into a context that has passed the point of no return. From now on, Molotov cocktails, barricades, and street fighting will be part of the tradition of street demonstrations in Brazil.

**Twelve years ago, Brazil had a powerful anti-capitalist movement. Describe how Lula's presidency and the electoral victories of the PT changed the political landscape and contributed to the eclipse of that movement.**

The entry of the PT—the Workers Party, the party of Lula and the current president, Dilma—into the presidency transformed the political landscape. However, to explain the transformation of the political context only in terms of representational politics not only obscures contingencies, micropolitics, and molecular resistance, but reproduces the modern-colonial attempts to see politics within the privileged sphere of cis-hetero-white-eurocentric-masculinist rationality.

When the Lula government came to power, the sections of the left and social movements that benefitted from PT support stopped engaging in anti-government confrontations in return for money and privileges. This caused many movements to decline, including the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), the student movement and unions, and even some sectors of the homeless movement and urban occupations, traditionally radical and nonpartisan.

This contributed to the decline of the anti-globalization movement, but it was not the only factor. The failure to cope with the advancement of pacifist ideology, the failure to create strategies and languages to break out of the boring traditions of the hegemonic left, and the inability to connect with other struggles also contributed to the decline of that movement. Beyond the external factors of macro and electoral geopolitics, the movement declined because it could not cope with the new context by renewing itself and creating new dynamics—“minor” dynamics, in the language of Deleuze and Guattari, “terrible” dynamics, in the language of Tiqqun.

The social assistance programs of the Lula government have also shifted the context. On the one hand, new income redistribution and credit policies raised much of the population above the poverty line, enabling a new mass to participate in spectacular capitalism, consuming the gadgets and lethargic subjectivity of middle class identity. This created widespread political apathy. On



the other hand, the credit policy has generated a huge mass of people who are no longer poor, but rather indebted. Combined with the mass entry of slum dwellers and poor people of color into universities via government programs, this politicized many sectors that traditionally were on the margins of hetero-capitalist society, producing a new indebted class with access to a discourse previously restricted to the privileged.

**The uprisings around the world that began with Greece in December 2008 and culminated with the Arab Spring in 2011 were all described as protests against austerity. What does it mean to see uprisings in countries like Brazil and Turkey where the economy is supposed to be “improving”?**

It is important to understand that Brazil’s economic growth came the hard way. It arose via a process of accumulation by dispossession—both in the countryside, where a massive influx of agro-industrial capital expanded monoculture and livestock exportation, and in the city, through urban commodification policies including the removal of slums and building occupations and the militarization of the city. But it is also important to remember that by June 2013, economic growth had already plateaued, with some evidence of decline: inflation has been relatively high this year, and the rising prices of basic commodities such as tomatoes only confirm this. Once more, the entry of a large part of the population into the arena of consumer capitalism occurred only via their going into debt.

This created a tense situation. Part of the population was directly hit by the negative consequences of this economic growth: construction of dams, killings and expulsions from the countryside, evictions and removals related to World Cup and international investments, military occupations of neighborhoods. Another part of the population is suffering from the halt of economic growth, and yet another part suffers from debt as a consequence of its supposed social ascent.

The management of Brazilian capitalism seems to have entered a time of crisis: most of its institutions are discredited, and the mechanisms that produce capitalist subjectivity seem to be breaking down. The hatred of party flags in the street demonstrations, the cries of “No more Dilma,” the disillusionment with politicians and corruption—rather than indicating that the population has been taken in by the speech of fascist and right-wing groups, these show that people are losing confidence in the most fundamental institutions of capitalism and the state. Moreover, it appears that the entry of a new population into consumer society has been a disappointment. The utopia depicted in electronics advertisements has turned out to be boring and unfulfilling.

**What has been the influence of the revolts in Greece and Spain, the Arab Spring, and the Occupy movement upon the popular imagination in Brazil? Did participants in the June uprising see themselves as connected to the people fighting in Turkey and Egypt at the same time?**

The Greek anarchist movement has long inspired the insurrectionary anarchist imagination in Brazil. However, until recently, we thought that the Greek anarchists could do such things because the Greek police are not militarized, whereas such revolts could never occur under Brazil’s military police. So, aside from inspiring a desire for more radical protests, Greek anarchists were not very influential. But we should also point out that the hetero-masculinist performance of

some parts of the Greek anarchist movement has provoked critique from anarcha-feminist, radical feminist, and insurrectionary and anarchist queer sectors here.

The Occupy movement also had some influence here. The occupations of squares occurring at the end of 2011 in Pôrto Alegre, Rio, São Paulo, and other cities in the country took a new generation and a new social demographic into the streets—and some of those sectors remained active, taking a role in the uprisings. This was not always for the best: part of the pacifist and nationalist wave that raged in mid-June occurred thanks to the holders of the Guy Fawkes masks, Anonymous activists and some members of Occupy.

The Turkish resistance movement exerted a vivid influence on uprisings in Brazil. First, because like Brazil, Turkey is a country where one rarely sees violent street demonstrations, despite the abject living conditions of much of the population. Chants like “It’s over love, so here will turn Turkey” echoed in Pôrto Alegre, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and other cities. Demonstrators adopted tactics of urban confrontation from the Turkish resistance: barricades of burning garbage, gallons of water in which to submerge tear gas canisters.

Meanwhile, a letter from the Egyptian movement in solidarity with the Brazilian uprising was received with a lot of emotion by protesters.

**What was the role of anarchists in initiating the uprising, and in pushing it further? In what ways were anarchist interventions in the events successful? In what ways did they fail?**

On one hand, it is important to highlight the role of anarchists in the events. Many of the clashes with police were led by anarchists or involved a great number of anarchists. Older anarchist militants helped maintain calm and share tactics during the tensest moments; this probably preserved momentum and also ensured the safety of the participants. Black blocs also had a role in the resistance; in cities like Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and São Paulo, they become a target of pacifist and communist parties, who felt that anarchists threatened their power. Black bloc tactics, initiated by anarchists, also spread throughout the demonstrations, especially in Belo Horizonte and Rio.

On the other hand, thankfully, anarchists were not as important as some would think. Much of the fighting and resistance was initiated by marginalized sectors of society: the unemployed, informal workers, poor workers, homeless people, street children, unemployed teenagers, and favela dwellers. In some moments of resistance—for example, when protesters drove the Caveirão off the streets, or in Belo Horizonte when protesters burned several car dealerships—you could see only a few anarchists. This shows that the radical tactics and spirit had spread throughout the multitude, or that the anarchists had dissolved themselves into the multitude. This is important: if the imperial capture apparatus cannot identify and isolate the source of revolt, the insurrection can spread.

It is still too early to make a balance sheet of anarchist participation in the revolt. However, it is clear that the most militant tactics, driven by young anarchists, radical feminists, anarcha-feminists, insurrectionary queers, and animal liberationists—sectors largely marginalized by social anarchism—were precisely the most effective tactics and the ones that spread the most in the demonstrations, playing a central role in the victory of the uprising.

**Have there been debates about violence versus non-violence? How have other people reacted to those who take more militant action?**

In the anti-globalization era, we sidestepped the debate about violence, non-violence, and diversity of tactics. But this debate has erupted in the current demonstrations with material consequences; it seems that now we're experiencing what the insurrectionary anarchists experienced in Seattle in 1999. Pacifists attacking radicalized protesters and anarchists; people giving flowers to policemen and inviting them to join the protest; demonstrators kneeling before the riot police advancing toward them with weapons; pacifists asking demonstrators to bend down so the police can identify protesters who are spray painting walls or destroying shops behind them; peaceful demonstrators denouncing protesters and delivering videos of radical actions to the police; communist parties making pamphlets criminalizing anarchists and black bloc'ers, or even physically attacking them.

Despite all this, most people feel that those victories were only possible because of the riots. This gives confidence and credibility to anarchists and insurrectionists; it also caused those tactics to spread. In cities like Rio, some center-left, social anarchist, and student sectors have sympathized with anarchists and insurrectionists and started a campaign against the criminalization of more militant actions.

**What was the role of social media in the revolt? How successful has the government been in using it to strike back at participants?**

The media has played an important role. The first major demonstrations against the increase were all announced through Facebook, and that has continued to this day. Videos of police brutality and popular resistance have been shared through social networks, offering a powerful counterpoint to the corporate media.

But we know that the internet is not an emancipatory space, but rather a hetero-capitalist capture apparatus. Facebook (called Fachobuk by some Brazilians—a play on the word “facho,” slang for fascist) itself was strangely slow, and some news sites could not be accessed or shared. We knew that the US government was watching Facebook and the ABIN (Brazilian Intelligence Agency) was also monitoring online profiles and email accounts. We knew that the police made fake profiles in order to search for information, and phones are being tapped, along with all the old-fashioned imperial practices of spying and infiltration.

**What internal and external limits did the revolt reach? What forms of repression failed or backfired against it? Which forms were successful, and why?**

Currently there are some difficulties in attempts to rearticulate the protests in some cities. The first obstacle is the challenge of dealing with the nationalist and pacifist middle-class demonstrators who have joined the protests. This difficulty is related to a larger impasse: the question of what strategies could hinder the adhesion of this and other reformist agendas to our struggles. There is also the challenge of linking the fare protest movement with other struggles: can we connect those who are showing up to these demonstrations now to the movement of urban occupations, or the fight against evictions, or the struggles against transphobia, heterosexism, and sexism? The reproduction of hierarchical power relations within the movement has also been a problem. Posters have appeared calling President Dilma a dyke, among other transphobic, misogynistic, and heterosexist acts.

As for repression, at first the state of São Paulo used a strategy of ordering the police not to initiate conflict, in an attempt to stifle the movement. Then they overcorrected this first strategy by intensifying repression, which clearly failed. The arrests, bail costs, and police intelligence investigations are also a strategy of intimidation. Despite some effect, this strategy has been fought back, thanks to the growing number of volunteer lawyers who have joined the struggles and the police brutality videos that are published on the internet every day.

**Speak more about the place of nationalism inside the movement, and in the backlash against it.**

It's true, the middle class and nationalists entered into the demonstrations. Their agendas are usually shallow and empty: against corruption and violence, for education... Its political impact occurred in the momentary disruption of radical sectors that were attacked by nationalists who claimed to oppose violence. Moreover, for a certain period, many people feared that extreme right-wings groups would get traction in the middle class.

This appearance of nationalists and the middle class functioned chiefly as a warning to groups focused on creating insurrectionary situations, rather than as a demonstration that these groups have political relevance. Moreover, we know that fascism is molecular: we saw this in the communists beating radical demonstrators and pacifists repeating homophobic chants.

**What do you expect to happen in Brazil next year, alongside the World Cup? How will this revolt change the shape of future struggles in Brazil? And what are the obstacles facing those who want to see these struggles go further?**

It is hard to imagine how things will be from now on. We know the risks of these attempts: Marxist futurology has made enough errors and missed quite a few lessons. However, we have some evidence in the current political ferment from which to build a political imagination about the coming year.

We know that for the police and the forces of empire, these protests and the Confederations Cup serve as a laboratory for the further development of biopolitical capitalism. In recent demonstrations, the police have used new weapons such as sound cannons, water cannons, and various types of pepper sprays and Tasers. We also know that the government is taking steps towards the suspension of laws and installation of the State of Exception. Senators are already revisiting the concept of "terrorism" in order to place political street demonstrations within this framework. The World Cup general law also uses this framework, giving power to the State, vetoing the right to demonstrate in the streets with violators subject to trial in international courts.

We also know the prospects of demonstrations to stop the World Cup. The slogans "You will not have Cup" and "I give up the World Cup, I want money for health and education" were chanted all over the country since the first demonstrations. We believe that the outlook is generally radicalized. In this sense, the expectation is of even bigger confrontations for the coming year, more people on the streets, more radicalization, but also more arrests, detentions, political repression, media manipulation, and conflict with nationalists, communists, and pacifists.

So we face many challenges. First, we have to ensure that these mobilizations remain radical and connected to other movements and struggles, to ensure the construction of a strong supportive network that can last into 2014. Another challenge is to find strategies to maintain militant

struggle while avoiding security problems that would lead to investigations, arrests, and prosecutions. An intense debate about anonymity, opacity, and social and public activism is being waged within radical organizations.

Of course, we never imagined that we would live to see street fighting in the era of “economic growth.” But it shows us the cracks in the empire’s great wall. Now we have to achieve a breakthrough for insurrectionary and anti-hegemonic social struggles in the country, so they cannot be captured or pacified. Those who have realized that they are expendable from the perspective of global capitalism must cease to understand themselves as a reconcilable opposition and enter a final antagonism with the empire. We have to go beyond the point of no return.

## **Part II. Giants and Monsters**

June 2013 saw the biggest wave of protest in Brazil’s recent history. Last month, we published a report from participants in this struggle, which began with demonstrations against a transit fare hike and quickly escalated into countrywide clashes. This is our second installment on the uprising, authored by another group, who offer a more critical perspective on the events.

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It isn’t easy to write about the demonstrations in Brazil that began in June 2013. Any attempt at analysis evaporated as the context changed dramatically from one day to the next. What began as a struggle for the reduction of the public transit fare hike became an outcry against police brutality. Then, after huge numbers of people joined the protests in the streets, the message dissolved into a fog of abstractions. When the corporate media realized how serious the threat of violence and property damage was, given the size and intensity of the demonstrations, they did an about-face, supporting the protesters and criticizing the violence of the police. Political figures, artists, and intellectual partisans of the status quo changed their tune, arguing that the demonstrations were legitimate, a fundamental “democratic right,” and represented the will of “all.” Finally, after a historic victory, the fare increase was repealed in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and over a dozen other major cities.

Let’s stop a moment to reflect on where we are, where we are going, and what the risks are.

In São Paulo, the first demonstration was on June 2, and the fare increase was revoked on June 19, after six demonstrations. There were days of massive clashes and police repression like no one had seen in Brazil for a long time. The mobilization reached its peak on June 20 when protesters took the streets in more than 100 cities with great anger against police violence, carrying out attacks on state property, the media, and corporations.

### **The National Context of the First Demonstrations**

The first protests against the fare hikes occurred in Pôrto Alegre in southern Brazil. In March 2013, protesters took the streets and blocked the bus ticket increase. In May, protests in Goiânia accomplished the same thing. However, the cost of not increasing the fares was imposed on taxpayers, not company profits.

The city government of São Paulo had not increased the rates for two years, but several municipalities had just announced a fare hike. On June 6, this was received, as usual, with protests by

autonomous student, worker, and youth organizations mobilizing through the Movimento Passe Livre (MPL: loosely, “Free Pass Movement”) under the banner “If the rate does not drop, São Paulo will stop.” Autonomous MPL cells in other regions of the country called demonstrations for the same day. In São Paulo, about 5000 people attended and the march was violently suppressed by the military police with sound bombs, tear gas, rubber bullets, and the usual brutality. The media described the protests as mere vandalism that necessitated a strong state response. Journalists and intellectuals called the protesters a “generation without direction and without cause,” the “spoiled children of the middle class.” Nothing new so far. Average numbers, and just a little more repression than usual. With tempers rising, a new demonstration was called for the next day, June 7. Another march, more graffiti and burning trash, another police ambush, and even more repression. Police shot rubber bullets randomly and a great deal of gas. The governments of the state and the city of São Paulo claimed they could not engage with “hooliganism” and “all or nothing” demands. The Federal government made a statement condemning the demonstrations and offering to help suppress them if necessary.

The third protest, on June 11, showed the repression could be even worse. The march started at Paulista Avenue with nearly 10,000 people escorted by 400 policemen. When participants attempted to occupy a bus terminal, the police responded again with violence and bombs, rubber bullets, and beatings, injuring dozens and making several arrests. There was resistance, and people destroyed many buses along the streets. About 20 people were arrested at random and accused of property damage; some were charged with gang conspiracy, a serious crime in Brazil. The fines amounted to \$10,000 for each individual. The government still insisted that it was impossible to return to the previous transit price.

The lack of dialogue and the repression produced a major mobilization in São Paulo for June 13, supporting the prisoners and denouncing police brutality. The popular response was massive: more than 20,000 people attended events promoted on social networks. It was also the day with the most arrests yet—230 altogether. Most of the arrestees were seized before the march began, just for carrying vinegar to protect themselves from tear gas. Journalists were arrested too. There were many reports of police beating people and even sexually abusing women. Despite everything, the authorities still refused to discuss the increase.

At this point, the media that had been calling the protesters “rebels without a cause” were finally forced to join the wave of criticism against the police, in a shameless attempt at co-optation. The press were embarrassed by the undeniable and disproportionate violence of the military police—who usually perpetrate such violence only in the forgotten streets of the favelas and the countryside, away from others’ eyes and cameras.

Many were injured on June 13, including protesters, passersby, and journalists. *Folha de São Paulo*, a conservative newspaper accused of morally and financially supporting the repression during the Brazilian military dictatorship, counted seven journalists wounded, including two shot in the face with rubber bullets. Curiously, this paper became the leading voice against police violence, radically changing its speech.

### **Cell Phones and Cameras as Weapons**

In the course of these events, a new factor became decisive. In all of the demonstrations across the country, protesters inspired by the Turkish resistance joined alternative independent media groups using cameras and cell phones to film the police, sharing the footage over the internet

live or on the same day. Practically all the clashes were initiated by police, who cornered people chanting “No violence” and fired upon them as they offered no resistance. It became clear that the police were violating their own protocol, which stipulates that they should only use rubber bullets to defend themselves when they are attacked, beginning with warning shots and then aiming below the waist.

Almost all the videos showed attacks on protesters standing with placards on street corners, people being shot in the face or beaten and arrested, including journalists from the mainstream media and anyone else who filmed police violence. Several images of injured people spread widely via the internet. This had unprecedented repercussions, forcing a shift in the mainstream media narrative to legitimize the marches as an expression of “democracy” and criticize the actions of the police. Journalists and conservative intellectuals apologized and changed their tone about the protests that were gaining support in the streets.

### **Reaching Goals, Losing Focus, and the Nationalist Shadow**

The fifth demonstration, called by the MPL for Monday, June 17, surprised those who had participated in the movement from the beginning. The momentum had spread across the country. More and more cities joined in, demanding lower prices and better quality in public transport, affirming other local causes including the right to protest itself, and decrying government overspending on infrastructure for the mega-events scheduled over the next few years. In the state of São Paulo, a young man was killed, hit by a driver who could not cross a street during the march.

In the federal capital of Brasilia, thousands took to the streets and around 5000 people surrounded the building of the Senate and Congress, attacking and invading it. The house was empty of political bigwigs, but corporate media filmed everything. This was the first really direct message to the Federal Government.

In Belo Horizonte, in addition to protesting the ticket price, people took to the streets against a ban criminalizing demonstrations that take any public road on the days of the matches of the soccer Confederations Cup; the legislation proposed sentences of up to 30 years for violators. This ban showed that Brazil was yielding to international pressure, especially from the United States, to adopt anti-terrorism laws for upcoming international sports events such as the 2014 Football World Cup and the 2016 Olympics.

In Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia, and Cuiaba, the clashes became increasingly violent; some of them occurred on or around the perimeter stipulated by FIFA for the stadiums where the Confederations Cup games were happening. This perimeter is only a preview of what they are planning for the World Cup, with FIFA imposing laws such as the prohibition of demonstrations and informal trade within three kilometers of the stadiums and perhaps even banning the right to strike.

As the clashes intensified, hackers invaded the websites and twitter profiles of government agencies and corporate media, using them to broadcast subversive texts and images of police violence, and inviting people to mobilize and continue the fight for lower fares.

The impact of police violence and the favorable coverage given by the media produced broad popular support, with many new people joining the movement. There were solidarity demonstrations in 27 countries worldwide. The international impact was huge and even the international corporate media strongly criticized the Brazilian police and government.

Yet the adhesion of the middle and upper class to the movement brought side effects. Across the country, people showed up with posters proclaiming phrases taken from Facebook and Twitter, slogans like “The giant awoke,” “It’s not just for 20 cents,” and vague statements against “corruption,” for tax cuts, and of love for a motherland in which people only occupy the streets for football and Carnival.

Early on the day of the fifth march in São Paulo, announcements appeared on the internet that building materials such as bricks and pieces of iron had appeared overnight at the starting point of the demonstration. In a nearby square, a bus from the city lines was parked in a very unusual place. Many feared this was an ambush, in which potential weapons were provided to incite violence that would be “properly” suppressed by the police. This news made the city hastily gather the materials, but the circus was just beginning.

That day, more than 100,000 people gathered in Largo da Batata, near the Faria Lima Metro Station, one of the newest and most modern stations in the city. The march followed a long, tiring route, escorted by hundreds of police officers. The “masses” in attendance had their faces painted green and yellow (the national colors) or were wrapped in the national flag, with clown noses, singing hymns and chanting their generic demands. The giant had woken up, but it had no idea what to do.

It was necessary to focus in order to stop the increase in fares. The protesters were permitted to tramp the sacred ground of Paulista Avenue because, according to the police, they deserved it for good behavior. However, dissidents marched to the Bandeirantes Palace, seat of State Government. The building was surrounded and forced open, so the police had to attack the protesters from inside the building to disperse the demonstration. The day concluded with great frustration about the loss of focus and the nationalism invading the movement.

But about two hours earlier, in Rio de Janeiro, the protests had radicalized when a crowd attacked the State Legislature, using sticks, stones, fireworks, and Molotov cocktails to corner 70 policemen inside the building. Cars were burned, 20 police officers were injured, and the building was destroyed with losses of more than a million dollars. The people of Rio de Janeiro showed that the participation of the masses could be overwhelming for the authorities as well as for the original protesters. Trapped, the police used live ammunition, shooting seven people. Other cities, such as Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte, also got in the news for confrontations, but in those cases police violence was the main story. In all the events from June 17 on, the media began to adopt specific language about the protest that was repeated on every network. In headline after headline and report after report, it was necessary to emphasize that a “minority” was responsible for the acts of violence and destruction, while the “vast majority” consisted of peaceful protesters that fit the profile required by a “democratic system.” Later, the minority became thugs, radicals, extremists, and even bandits and dangerous criminals. This was the same minority that had initiated the movement in the first place!

The sixth demonstration, on June 18, was the last one before the rate increase was repealed; it also put new questions to the movement. The advocates of pacifism that had brought in a pride in citizenship and the desire to “preserve the public good” denounced and even personally attacked those writing graffiti and committing acts of “vandalism.” That day, the Military Police disappeared from the streets of São Paulo. More than 100,000 protesters marched through the center again and down Paulista Avenue. But some people from the “minority that spoils the movement” walked downtown and arrived at City Hall without difficulty. Anyone who has witnessed demonstrations in front of that building before knows it is almost untouchable and always



guarded by the forces of the Military Police (which is administered by the state government) and the Municipal Guard.

That day, the MP was not there to protect the building; its cabin located on the same corner as the City Hall was empty. In a suspicious turn of events, the way was open for the crowd. Probably the Military Police, ruled by the right-wing State Government, wanted to see the Mayor in the same danger they had faced the previous night. The result was that the City Hall was surrounded; the Municipal Guard was cornered and forced to enter the building. Its front door was smashed and decorated with graffiti. The gatehouse of the MP was destroyed and burned. A television van was torched. The streets of downtown were unprotected against the newly released anger of the people. Dozens of shops were looted by “a few thugs.” The next day, June 19, the rate increase was rescinded.

### **100 Cities Take the Streets—and with Them, 100 Million New Policemen**

When he finally understood the scale of popular pressure, Mayor Fernando Haddad met with the bigwigs of his party, the PT (Workers Party), including former president Lula, president Dilma, and some marketing managers concerned with his image. The Mayor changed his tone, announcing in meetings with the MPL and in public statements that it was possible not to increase the price of tickets but it was not yet possible to predict when this could be formalized. The morning after the attack on City Hall, he announced that there would be no increase anymore.

The seventh day of action became a celebration day in Sao Paulo. Over 100 cities around the country also hosted demonstrations and clashes. In Brasilia, the Palace of the Foreign Ministry, the headquarters of international relations, was surrounded with the president and ministers trapped inside. The entrance hall of the building was invaded and attacked as a crowd of over 10,000 protesters throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails took the unprepared building security by surprise. It was estimated that nearly 2 million people took to the streets nationwide. Yet the climate of optimism was fading in many places.

In Porto Alegre, the scene of some of the most violent conflicts with the Military Police, the anarchist group Federação Anarquista Gaúcha (FAG) had its headquarters invaded by police. About 15 ununiformed policemen wearing only vests, said to be the Federal Police, raided the place without presenting any warrant, seizing materials such as books and paint in an attempt to incriminate the group for vandalism. The “minorities” that cause destruction and “come into confrontation” with police must be identified and isolated from the “good citizens” who occupy the streets “democratically.” Again, several protesters were grabbed and handed over to the police by other protesters for painting graffiti, attacking buildings and banks, or even simply covering their faces. It seemed to be the beginning of a nationwide manhunt.

### **Brazil is a Pressure Cooker**

The celebratory demonstration in Sao Paulo revealed something even worse than nationalism. In his move to restore the image of the PT, Mayor Haddad invited all members and supporters to occupy the streets dressed in red and with their flags to celebrate the victory of the people; he called this the “Red Wave.” Right-wing groups, claiming to be “anti-party,” tried to use the non-partisan tone of the demonstrations to take advantage of the stupidity of thousands of uncritical protesters to call for open season on Left parties, black and gay movements, and other political

minorities. An anarchist group marching nonviolently in black with a red and black flag was booed by protesters who opposed the party flags, confirming their ignorance of everything that was going on: they thought the anarchists were a party.

Several clashes exploded between protesters for and against the presence of parties, creating a tense atmosphere on Paulista Avenue. At the same time, in the building of FIESP (Federation of Industries of the State), military officials and politicians were discussing new directions for the defense industry.

The bright panels of the building showed a giant flag of Brazil, and the chants against political parties had no libertarian spirit. In this nationalist atmosphere, the protest was directed against the current mayor and the president of Brazil, as representatives of the PT.

It was the first time since its foundation that this party had been thrown out of a mass demonstration by the people itself. Society has changed and they have failed to extend their connections to the newer generations, remaining tied only to some older movements like the MST (Landless Workers Movement). The right wing hoped to take advantage of this situation. These right-wing politicians run the state of Sao Paulo with Geraldo Alckimin (PSDB)—the same government that controls the Military Police that withdrew so City Hall could be attacked one night before. In this fog of vague ideas and nationalist sentiments, it's hard to know who is who, what they want, and how they pursue their goals.

This moment served the elite in their agenda to recapture the presidency of the republic and intensify the repression of popular social movements. The climate of tension and uncertainty remained. There were rumors on the streets and the internet about a new military coup. The United States exchanged its ambassador in Brazil with the one that was in Paraguay during the military coup in 2012. The MPL announced the end of demonstrations after its goals have been achieved, warning that the fight would continue in other ways and it was not useful to insist on unfocused demonstrations now that its original goals had been met.

Meanwhile, on the border of Sao Paulo and in many other cities, less privileged people rose to demand their rights by closing roads. In the northern zone of São Paulo, a policeman was shot and three protesters were killed—a more serious toll than at any national demonstration for two weeks. The lives of those in the favelas who are not white or middle class are very distant from the reality people experience in the city center. The police treat resistance in the favelas differently; they occupy these areas nonstop, readily employing brutal force far from the eyes of public opinion.

Other demonstrations were called by autonomous, nonpartisan groups hoping to maintain popular pressure around many other issues pending in Brazil. The country is a pressure cooker; the wave of demonstrations in June was just a tiny bit of steam escaping. In Rio de Janeiro on June 24, people from a favela called Mare demonstrated; in response they suffered a military incursion by the BOPE (a murderer elite police troop), who killed 13 people. Instead of rubber bullets, only real ones were fired.

### **The Means Must Justify Itself Now: This Fight Has No End**

In Brazil, there are countless reasons to protest. Allegations of torture against protesters have been reported in Salvador and other cities. The evangelical lobby is pressing Congress to approve psychological treatment for homosexuality and ban abortion in cases of rape—a tremendous setback for a right that women already possess only in cases of sexual violence. Anti-terrorism

laws are to be voted in under US pressure to criminalize demonstrations that block the street or cause property damage. MST activists and MTST activists (the Homeless Movement) are persecuted and arbitrarily arrested. UN representatives are asking Brazil to end the Military Police, and popular groups are organizing to support this. Research shows that Brazil already has about 5000 unregulated drones flying; the BOPE and landowners are testing this technology. FIFA continues to press Brazil for more security for business during next year's World Cup. Evictions continue everywhere in order to modernize the cityscape and build roads, airports, and structures for the upcoming mega-events. In indigenous territories, there are battles to make way for dams and power stations and secure the advancement of agri-business. The demarcation of indigenous lands is no longer the responsibility of FUNAI (National Indian Foundation) but now the EMBRAPA (Brazilian Agricultural and Livestock Research).

Popular committees bringing together communities, students, and unions are forming in Belo Horizonte and elsewhere to discuss the next direction for popular demands. The fight is far from over. Now the people of Brazil have a new action profile in their résumé—for good or for ill. There is a lot to discuss about how to maintain a struggle without being contaminated by middle-class patriotism imported from football and Carnival, and how to face the elites who are determined to destroy or coopt the general discontent. Now the State and the Police also know what can happen when people come out to the streets; they will be careful not to make the same mistakes again. The fight is becoming increasingly harsh; new obstacles appear everywhere we have succeeded in taking a step forward. Anarchists and radicals, who have remained outside the spotlight of the media and police until now, will be persecuted as before, along with other “inciters of violence and vandalism.” Many already face charges.

We need a new security culture to protect individuals and groups mobilizing in social struggle, new ways of defending and attacking without taking too many risks. We need to discuss diversity of tactics, considering that our militarized police force is comparable to those in countries under dictatorship or foreign occupation, prepared to kill without any dialogue. According to Amnesty International, in the favelas and in the countryside, it is the biggest killer on the planet.

At the same time, we need to make what we are doing as horizontal, autonomous, liberating, and pleasurable as possible, because the end does not seem to be even visible on the horizon. The means will be all we have for a long time.

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