

The Bitter Taste of Brazil's World Cup

Written by Raúl Zibechi

Wednesday, 29 February 2012 20:09



Source: [Americas Program](#)

With two years to go before the World Cup in Brazil, already people are questioning the massive evictions caused by the Cup's enormous infrastructure projects and the legal privileges that must be conceded to the all-powerful FIFA, which has set itself up as a kind of super-state capable of imposing its own laws and special tribunals.

“The people believe that they will prosper with the arrival of the World Cup, but the truth is that they will be brutally repressed,” warns Roberto Morales, advisor to Socialist Liberty Party Representative Marcelo Freixo. The agreements between the Brazilian government and the Federate International Football Association (FIFA) restrict merchandise sales around the stadiums and ban vendors from coming within two kilometers of the events.

“The World Cup will be great business, but only for the big sporting goods companies and those authorized to sell food and drinks,” Morales laments.

Morales is part of the Popular Committee of the World Cup that was created when people decided to resist being forcibly evicted from their homes to make way for new facilities for the Panamerican Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2007. “We began to see that evictions aren't the only problem with hosting big events— we also saw other problems, such as corruption. The new facilities for the Panamerican Games were supposed to cost 300 million reales but they ending up costing 3.5 billion.” That's a total of nearly two billion dollars.

This situation is especially visible in Rio de Janeiro—one of the main sites for the 2014 World Cup and the host of the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. Popular Committees have been formed in all 12 of the cities that will host games for the World Cup, and they are mobilizing under the banner that demands that “The World Cup and the Olympics must respect human rights.”

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On Dec. 12, the committees presented officials of the twelve site cities with a dossier entitled "Mega-events and Human Rights Violations in Brazil." The documents analyze issues ranging from the right to housing, to labor rights for the workers who build the new facilities, to the lack of environmental impact studies on projects that are running up against the clock.

The Right to Housing

Brazil has a housing deficit of 5 million units. The construction projects for the World Cup, from the new stadiums to airport and highway renovations, will cost 20 billion dollars—all for a tournament that will last less than a month. To put this amount in context, that's nearly half of Uruguay's annual GDP. This colossal investment will be extracted from all tax-paying Brazilians for the benefit of a few select corporations.

Even though the government hasn't given out any information on how many families will be evicted by the new projects, it is estimated that they will affect 170,000 people. The group of Popular Committees has detected a pattern that is repeated in all of the cities where evictions will occur. They claim that "The lack of prior information and notification generates instability and fear with respect to the future," which paralyzes the at-risk families and puts them at the mercy of speculators and powerful interests.

Nearly all who will be affected live in poor neighborhoods and often times in precarious, informal housing arrangements. In the metropolitan area of Curitiba, 1,173 properties will be affected by the construction of the new 52-kilometer Metropolitan Corridor, new rail access points, and the reconstruction and widening of various avenues and highways. The expansion of the airport and its parking lots implies the removal of 320 homes, but not a single one of the inhabitants has been informed about the compensation they will receive or where they will be relocated.

In Belo Horizonte a giant real estate development is being built that takes up a full 25,000 acres of fertile land to construct 75,000 apartments. This development will be called Cup Village and will originally serve as the lodging place for the different delegations, tourists, and journalists attending the World Cup. In the city of Fortaleza, 15,000 families will be affected; 10,000 of which will have to be resettled, but they still haven't been informed of where they will live.

The majority of those affected will be displaced as a result of expanding existing roads or

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building new ones. The Fortaleza Expressway will cross through 22 neighborhoods to connect hotels to the Castelão stadium. This group of displaced families can choose between an indemnity, a unit in a housing project, or an exchange for another property in a neighborhood in Brasilia. Even though 70 percent have chosen the housing project, societal pressures have stopped the entire process until a better solution, with better conditions, is presented.

Hundreds of homes slated to be demolished this year around the periphery of Fortaleza have been marked with green ink, but the inhabitants of those homes haven't heard a single word from the officials about when the demolitions are going to happen.

The Popular Committees of the World Cup affirm that the government is applying "strategies of war and persecution" in 21 villas and favelas in seven host cities, "such as the marking of houses for demolition without explanation, warrantless home invasions, and the undue appropriation and destruction of property." This is on top of threats, the cutting-off of services, and other acts of intimidation.

The work being done for the World Cup facilitates a kind of "social cleansing" motivated by property speculation and the eviction of families that have lived in their homes for four or five decades. It's happening in San Pablo with the construction of the Parque Lineal Llanos del Tietê, a flood zone where 4,000 families have already been removed and another 6,000 will soon be expelled.

Given the experience of previous mega-sports events in both developed and developing countries, the cost of living will rise and real estate speculation will take off as development displaces some and attracts those who can afford more expensive property. The thousands of displaced are merely pushed to the periphery.

State of Exception

The Brazilian Parliament is being forced to pass the "General Law of the World Cup" that establishes the rules that will govern how the Confederations Cup of June 2013 and the World Cup of the following year are carried out. But even after months of debate, the law still hasn't even been passed out of the special committee in the House of Representatives that was assigned to analyze it. The Sports Minister, Aldo Rebelo, has since promised the Secretary

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General of FIFA, Jerome Valcke, that the bill would be voted on after more deliberation in March.

The bill was presented in the Brazilian Congress by the executive branch, using criteria established by FIFA. On Dec. 6, 2011 it was brought to a general vote by the Representatives, but the vote was delayed because a number of representatives deemed the bill contradictory to existing Brazilian law. For example, the sale of alcohol is prohibited in stadiums, but FIFA demands lifting the restriction, which, according to some Brazilian legislators, could lead to violent consequences.

Another sticking point revolves around FIFA's refusal to allow the special deal that grants students, retirees, recipients of state assistance, and handicapped people half-priced entrance. Additionally, the so-called "Pelé Law" that gives professional athlete unions 5 percent of income generated by the broadcasts of sporting events would be completely suspended for the World Cup games.

FIFA is also demanding that the host country grant visas and work permits to all of the delegation members, invitees, employees of the respective soccer confederations, journalists and spectators of other countries that have purchased tickets to the World Cup. These special permits expire on December 31st of 2014, six months after the end of the World Cup. In sum, a great deal of the country's national legislation must be suspended to attend to the demands of FIFA.

The report from the Popular Committees of the World Cup also denounces the violation of the rights of workers in the informal sector (almost two-thirds of Brazilians). Article 11 of the Law of the World Cup prohibits the sale of any kind of merchandise in "official competition locations, in their immediate surroundings, and their main access ways," without the express authorization of FIFA.

The definition and limits of the "exclusive areas" for the sale of FIFA products will have to be demarcated by individual cities "taking into account the requirements of FIFA or of authorized third parties." Street vendors will be expressly excluded from these areas. The exact perimeters of these restrictive zones still hasn't been defined, but based on previous experience, it can be estimated that the "exclusion zone" will be two kilometers.

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Article 23 penalizes bars that try to transmit World Cup games without the appropriate authorization or that promote certain brands not authorized by FIFA. The National Business Confederation and vendor unions have expressed their strong opposition to the Law of the World Cup.

Perhaps the most troubling part of all is that the bill provides that through Article 37 “Special trials for the processing and judgment of cases related to the events may be formed.” Finally, Article 38 provides that FIFA, its legal representatives, consultants and employees “will remain free from costs, emoluments, fees, and other expenses to the institutions of Federal Justice, Labor Justice, Military Justice,” and other branches of Brazilian government.

The vassalage that FIFA insists on imposing on host countries might lead to the delay of the law's approval and generate problems in the government's allied base, perhaps even in the ruling Partido Trabalhadores (Workers Party).

The International Olympic Committee has similar demands. In 2009, Law 12.035 was passed which, in addition to the previously mentioned provisions, establishes the transfer of public real estate funds to the Olympic Games, the transfer of exclusive public property spaces, and “the designation of resources to cover the eventual operational deficits of the Organizing Committee of the 2016 Rio Games.”

The law declares that between July 5 and Sept. 26 “advertising contracts in public spaces in airports or in federal areas that are of interest to the 2016 Rio Games” are null and void.

The power accumulated by sports federations in recent decades is capable of imposing its will on millions of citizens across the world—the people who sustain them in the first place—and on powerful countries of every continent, without being subject to public debates that could bring to light the framework of interests behind the many abuses.

Upscaling the stadiums

Around 203,000 people attended the 1950 World Cup final in Macaraná. At the time, that

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represented about 8.5% of the total population of Rio de Janeiro. The “general” and “popular” seating sections where middle and working class people watched the game, represented 80% of the total seating. Spectators watched the whole game standing up, making room for one another in a stadium that had a maximum capacity of 199,000.

The stadiums where diverse sectors of society used to mix began to change in the 1990s. The justification for this kind of “Europeanization” of the stadiums was security and comfort, and it was part of a global campaign in which FIFA, local soccer federations, and clubs (spurred by private sponsors) participated. Towards the end of the decade, ticket price rose, making it more and more difficult for working-class families and the lower middle-class to attend games.

The legendary Maracanã stadium saw its capacity reduced almost by half, to only 103,022 people, after a remodeling project in 1999 undertaken to host the Club World Cup in 2000. That project installed individual seating in the top ring of the stadium. Between April 2005 and January of 2006, the stadium was closed for renovations to host the 2007 Panamerican Games. This time the “general admission” section— where the audience used to stand— was replaced with individual seating, further reducing the capacity to just 82,238. But at least the seats are reclinable.

Before the current remodel, Maracanã was a “multipurpose arena” that hosted not only sporting events but also concerts and a wide range of shows. Above the grandstands they have built luxury boxes with great views of the field, and glass walls that separate the VIPs from the rest of the spectators. They're equipped with bars, televisions, and air conditioning and are usually rented out to businesses that invite their associates and functionaries. They have the privilege of arriving directly in their cars, via a private ramp, without having to put up with even the slightest contact with the “masses.”

Maracanã is currently suffering through a new remodel in preparation for the 2014 World Cup final and the 2016 Olympic Games. Since mid- 2010 the stadium has been closed to make changes that comply with the dictates of the “FIFA master,” which demands that all of the stadiums have enclosed roofs. The whole roof of the stadium must now be modified.

In reality, the stadium was gutted and only the shell remains- a shell considered to be national patrimony. The reconstruction will be handled by private interests, cost billions of reales (at least 600 million dollars), and will have even less seating that will only get more and more expensive.

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More than a soccer stadium, it will be a theater. A theater with numbered seats where you cannot follow the game on your feet. As a result, the collective, creative spaces for the fans—fun-loving, lively, impassioned and rowdy as they are—have been abolished. And in their place there only remains the prospect of pre-hashed choreography like “the wave” and the dull display of little individual flags.

From once being the *maior do mundo* (largest in the world), Macaraná fell to a modest 14th place, far behind the two largest stadiums on the planet: the Rungrado May Day (North Korea) with a capacity of 150,000 and the Salt Lake of Calcutta (India) with 120,000 seats. But most telling of all, Macaraná has ceased to be a place of public recreation and has become a tool for business and spectacle—aspects that have very little to do with soccer's original popular spirit.

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