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Brazil against Bolsonaro

Lessons from “The Battle of the Paulistas”

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The streets are the main site for resistance against Bolsonaro. We must reclaim them.

São Paulo witnessed a tense standoff for four hours, including a real pitched battle for two hours, between two unequal sides on 31 May. [1] The Military Police of São Paulo, the best trained, best equipped in the country, on one the side. Anti-fascist on the other side organized by soccer fans, mostly from the Corinthians’ Faithful Hawks club (Gaviões da Fiel), but also Palmeiras, São Paulo and “antifa” Santos fan clubs as well. They decided to demonstrate for democracy near where the São Paulo Bolsonaroists usually meet at the same time.

The “homies” arrived shortly after noon, almost all dressed in black, looking like an old school battalion carrying a huge banner for democracy, drums, and their own security team. They installed themselves in the gap and in front of the Museum of Art of São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand in the middle of Avenida Paulina, São Paulo’s main drag. From the beginning, they were surrounded by an immense number of military police (MPs) with menacing attitudes. Of course the press said the police were working to prevent the two groups from confronting each other.

Four blocks away, no more than 100 hundred supporters of the neo-fascist president gathered in front of the Chamber of Commerce (Fiesp) headquarters. The Bolsonaroists were vocal as usual, but demonstrated some innovations by carrying Ukrainian neo-Nazi flags (hello?) and then there was the “innocent” female baseball fan carrying a bat whose shirt read FASCIST. A video of a policeman escorting this lady out of the area after she tried to provoke a small group of passers-by with the bat spread quickly on social media.

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Around 2:15 pm, the MPs attacked the anti-fascists in front of the Masp. According to a legal observer present on the scene, the pitched battle started because a Bolsonaroist, backed up by three others, tried to enter the opposition bloc – evidently aiming for a provocation.

The antifascists prevented the Bolsonaroists from wading into their group passage, which gave the police an excuse to start raining tear gas bombs and to send in riot police against the demonstrators. (Obviously the São Paulo MPs are giving a diametrically opposed version in which the demonstrators provoked the police.)

Once the resistance began, more than forty Shock Battalion police (with 6 or 8 police vehicles backing them up), armed with shields, clubs, and tear gas grenade launchers tried for 90 minutes to force the anti-fascists to withdraw from the street... ironically the length as a regulation soccer game!

In the midst of the pitched battle, the antifascists effected an organized and combative retreat, in which the organization, tenacity, and technique of the team in black were on full display. They had obviously had some experience (and some had a lot of experience) in facing down police violence.

The antifascists threw stones and hurled back tear gas canisters, defended themselves with movable metal fences, and used pieces of construction siding to slow down the police... they used everything they could get their hands on. In the end, the police failed to disperse them. The five arrests made by police were a small price to pay for the size and duration of the confrontation.

Lessons from “The Battle of the Paulistas”

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The result of the “Battle of the Paulistas,” broadcast live by the media offers some lessons for the social and political opposition to Bolsonaro:

1. The Military Police serve Bolsonarism. Watch out.
2. State governors should be asked by civil society to place limits on police abuses at all levels.
3. It is necessary to face fascism with organized action. There is nothing to dialogue over with people carrying golf clubs and Ukrainian fascist flags, wearing Ku Klux Klan clothing, shouting Nazi-fascist rhetoric.
4. The streets are the most important site for this confrontation, although petitions and institutional actions also have their roles. We must start to reclaim the streets taking all necessary social-distancing and protective measures.
5. We need unity between all Brazilian soccer fans! Between the Greeks and Trojans, the Russians and Bahians to oppose the snake Bolsonaro. If the Corinthians’s Faithful Hawks were in the majority and dictated tactics on Sunday, there were also rival fans. I only wish that opposition political parties – in particular those on the left – and social movements throughout Brazil acted like São Paulo’s soccer fans on this sunny Sunday. There’s still time.

31 May 2020

Source: translated by [No Borders News](#) from [Insurgência](#).

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[1] ABC News, 31 May 2020 [“Police disperse anti-Bolsonaro protesters in Brazil”](#).