

World Cup 2014: Public anger at spending and corruption may be the lasting image from Brazil

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OPINION

BY BRIAN READE



Citizens in the host nation are taking to the streets to protest a variety of gripes – and even FIFA can't turn a blind eye

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2014 Getty Images

Unrest: Many in Brazil are angry about World Cup spending

The doom-laden missive from Recife didn't make pretty reading.

"Terrible scenes today. Police on strike so looting and riots. Two dozen dead and so much anarchy they sent in tanks and the National Guard. I fear for this World Cup."

It was sent last week from someone I met when I visited the north-eastern Brazilian city in November. The city where England will play their last 16 game if they win their group (I know, I know).

He was reflecting on another day of protest, replicated in cities across Brazil, against **a World Cup that has become the focal point for public sector workers and political activists** angry that £11 billion is being spent by politicians and their corrupt lackeys to keep FIFA happy, while their health, education and transport budgets are decimated.

As 20,000 took to the streets amid calls for a general strike, the most popular banner read "Na Copa vai ter luta" (the World Cup will have protests). These are people battered by austerity and depleted services, enraged that only 10% of the public transport projects (which was sold as the World Cup's main legacy) have been

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completed and white elephants, like the stadium in Brasilia, which has no top-flight team to play in it after the tournament, cost £600 million.

If the UKIP vote has kicked our political establishment up the backside, the incessant protests in Brazil are booting the Brazilian government and the Blatterati the length of the Amazon.

Speaking to Sport Recife fans at a home game in November, the general feeling was that although they were pleased Brazil was hosting the World Cup, it wasn't for them. The ticket prices, the new stadiums (Recife's has been built 20 kilometres outside their gridlocked city) were aimed at rich Brazilians, tourists and the wider world.



Brian Reade / Daily Mirror

On the road: Brian Reade at Sport Recife's stadium

While I was there two workers were killed when a crane collapsed on them in Sao Paulo, with blame assigned to FIFA's unrealistic deadlines. The feeling of being shafted by FIFA and the corrupt politicians who had facilitated them was on most fans' lips. Thrown into the mix was the fear that the humiliation may extend to the pitch as this Brazil squad isn't good enough.

The potential for a disastrous World Cup undoubtedly exists. But maybe we should flip the pessimism on its head and argue that whatever happens over the next six weeks, football will win.

If Brazil go all the way the protesters (who look set to be kept outside a two-kilometre radius of the grounds) will be marginalised, the country will embrace the World Cup like no other nation has, and **the much-awaited carnival in football's spiritual home will live long in the memory.**

If Brazil go out early the pent-up anger at the colossal waste of money could explode across the country. No exclusion zones around the stadia will stop the world seeing this and asking what happened to the accepted wisdom of Brazilians loving football more than life itself.

Then maybe, on the subject of life, questioning why Sepp Blatter and co are turning a blind eye to the 1,200 slave-wage migrants who have died building stadia in Qatar for the 2022 World Cup, before starting a social media campaign that brings down the whole pack of cards.

So, everyone a winner.

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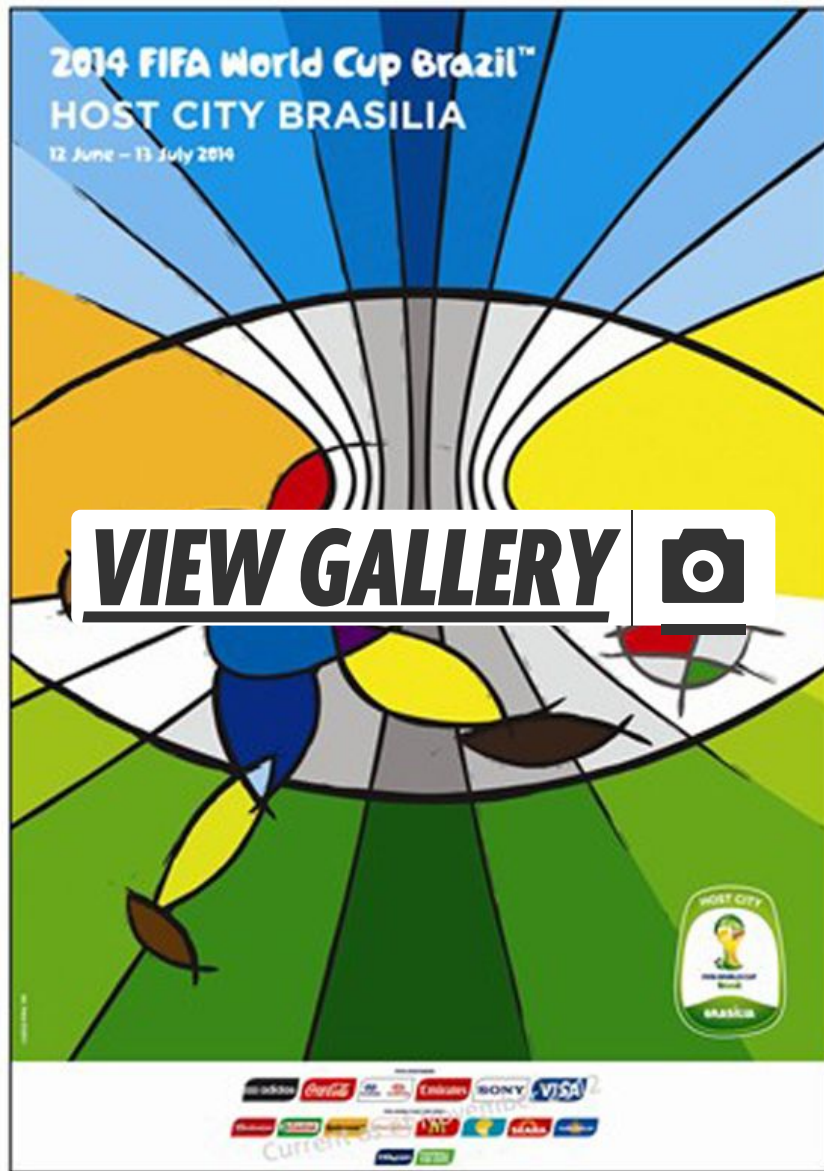
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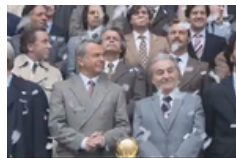
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