

A day in the life of Ivan Ergich

Bursaspor gets a Marxist player

A Marxist footballer in Turkey? A player who is as comfortable reeling off critical theorists of the Frankfurt School as he is of his favourite footballing colleagues, such as Messi, Ronaldinho and Zidane? This is particularly anomalous given Turkey's history of political and ideological repression for most of the twentieth century. Adopting Mussolini's Penal Code wholesale during the founding decades of the new republic, the Turkish ruling classes systematically persecuted socialist ideas and where necessary unleashed the armed forces to crush revolutionary youth and trade-union movements. These draconian laws have been camouflaged over the past decade in attempts to be seen to be complying with measures required to become a full member of the European Union. Yet the structures and legislation embedded by the military junta of 1980–83 still permeate the Turkish polity.

A recent interview in the left-liberal Istanbul daily newspaper *Radikal* (15 September 2009) with Turkish Premiership team Bursaspor's newly acquired Serbian player Ivan Ergich makes interesting reading in this regard. Readers are informed that Ivan Ergich, who captained the Swiss side FC Basel, before moving over to the giants of Serie A, Juventus, will now be playing in the Turkish Premier League. Ergich says:

Professional football is a pitiless job. Almost all managers encourage cheating and aggression against opponent, so that by the time you are on the field you are primed like a bomb, ready to go off....

He stated in a previous interview that the corruption charges which had been brought against his former side Juventus, resulting in the team being demoted to a lower league, brought about a clinical depression which took him out of the game for four months. For Ergich all these negatives are linked to the role money plays in professional football, which he sees as a direct consequence of the 'capitalist system':

One of my greatest sources of inspiration is Karl Marx. I grew up in what was then Yugoslavia, where my father was an orthodox Communist Party

member. He taught me how to be human. Marx had unravelled the contradictions of capitalism some 150 years earlier and showed how the cash nexus corrupted the world. Money also corrupts football. I don't want to be a conformist footballer. I need inspiration beyond football.

And what were these sources of inspiration?

I am inspired by the Frankfurt School of Adorno and Horkheimer. I also read a lot of Sartre. That is how I can maintain my principles, put my principles ahead of the pressures that demand that in football we succeed at any cost. Marx showed us that the contradictions of capitalism would negate the human essence and lead to alienation. I want to avoid this.

Ivan Ergich no longer plays for the Serbian national side because of what he considers to be chauvinist sentiments and elements in the team. He sometimes upsets Bursaspor supporters by challenging referee-



ing decisions *in his favour*, if he thinks these are not correct or warranted, even in crucial fixtures for this struggling side.

Given the obscenity of the astronomical transfer fees alongside the crippling indebtedness and impending bankruptcy of some leading football teams during the current period of capitalist financial crisis, and the cult of the *galactico* cultivated across Europe, Ergich emerges as a voice of sanity, maintaining a semblance of humanistic standards in the beautiful game.

A Galatasaray Supporter