

THE SOCCER WORLD CUP IS HERE BUT THE POOR CONTINUE TO 'FEEL' HARDSHIP

The Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) and allies will be embarking on a march tomorrow (11th June) to coincide with the opening of the 2010 Soccer World Cup. The march will start at 09h00 from Ben Naude Drive, opposite Fons Luminous Combined School Assembly Area and will proceed along the Rand Show Road/Aerodrome Drive towards Soccer City. The APF urges all community and other civil society organisations who share our concerns and who wish to add their voices, to join us. We have no intention of disrupting the World Cup but simply to voice our discontent/concerns.

Despite the APF's attempts to overturn them, conditions have been imposed by the Johannesburg Metro Police (in the name of 'national security') such that the march will not be allowed to proceed to Soccer City itself but will end at a designated 'speakers corner' some 1,5 kms away from the stadium. A memorandum of grievances and demands from communities that make up the APF has been drawn up and all the main local, provincial and national government offices have been contacted to come and receive this memorandum.

The Soccer World Cup is here and the official theme is "feel it, it is here". However, despite the fact that most people love the game of soccer, poor communities are only feeling the hardship of South Africa's hosting of the World Cup and the neoliberal policies which continue to ensure that poor people remain poor.

The massive amounts of public funds used to build new stadiums and related infrastructure for this World Cup have only served to further deny poor people the development and services they have been struggling for over many years. Millions remain homeless, unemployed and in deep poverty, thousands in poor communities across South Africa continue to be brutally evicted and those struggling to survive (like street vendors) are being denied basic trading rights and are criminalised.

Yet, our government has managed, in a fairly short period of time, to deliver 'world class' facilities and infrastructure that the majority of South Africans will never benefit from or be able to enjoy. The APF feels that those who have been so denied, need to show all South Africans as well as the rest of the world who will be tuning into the World Cup, that all is not well in this country, that a month long sporting event cannot and will not be the panacea for our problems. This World Cup is not for the poor - it is the soccer elites of FIFA, the elites of domestic and international corporate capital and the political elites who are making billions and who will be benefiting at the expense of the poor.

For the past fifteen years the majority of South Africans have continued to suffer the inheritances of the apartheid regime and neoliberal macro-economic policies. General living conditions, largely due to a lack of basic services and employment opportunities, have gone from bad to worse to bad. These problems are very real and they range from:

- * the huge backlog in formal housing (parallel to the increased growth in shack settlements in all main urban and peri-urban areas)
- * lack of access to electrification in many poor areas (upwards of 30% of South Africans - most of whom are poor - remain unelectrified and are forced to use dangerous substitutes such as paraffin and candles)
- * a poor quality public education system (in which educational resources are scarce and a serious crises in the provision of basic services at public schools continues)
- * a dire lack of proper recreational facilities and programmes in poor communities (contributing to a range of serious social problems, especially amongst the youth)
- * the immense number of impoverished, unemployed people across the country (despite the promises of job creation through the World Cup, over 1 million have lost their jobs over the past two years - including those workers casually

employed to build the new stadiums - and the real unemployment rate is around 40% - a national crisis!).

The APF wants to make it clear that we love the game of soccer. Soccer is a predominately working class sport that is enjoyed by billions around the globe. But this World Cup does not represent those billions but rather the interests of a small elite who have manipulated the beautiful game and have used this World Cup to make massive profits at the expense of poor ordinary South Africans who, after all, are the ones who have paid - through the public purse - for what so few will enjoy.

South Africa is the most unequal society in the world and we believe that addressing this socio-economic inequality must be the top priority of our country, our government is addressed. One World Cup - no matter how much we enjoy watching soccer - is not going to address or solve our fundamental problems. The more we continue to allow the elites to hide the realities of our country, to falsely claim that this World Cup will provide lasting social unity and leave a positive developmental 'legacy' and to spend public funds to do so, the farther we move from confronting the real problems that the majority in our country experience every day of their lives.

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