

# The Hidden Struggle Behind the World Cup



The World Cup is over, the TV crews have departed, and the South African government must be happy. The world's media portrayed it as the crowning achievement of sixteen years of post-apartheid development.

With the African continent's largest economy and one of the most progressive constitutions in the world,

South Africa is considered by most to be a model middle-income developing country. Many will look on with pride, happy that they helped play a part in the anti-apartheid boycott movement which helped to bring that terrible racist system to an end.

## ★ The Reality

However, there's another side to South Africa - both in its history and its current circumstances, a side generally neglected by the western media, a side that the average person would need to seek out, a side that does not sit well with the rosy picture painted above.

This side tells us that South Africa is the most unequal society in the world. It tells us that South Africa is ranked 129 out of 182 UN member states in the Human Development Index - 19 places below the besieged territories of Gaza and the West Bank.

It tells us that it has steadily become worse since the mid-1990's when Nelson Mandela's ANC government voluntarily adopted neo-liberal economic policies, privatising water and electricity. Average life expectancy has dropped by 13 years in this time. This side makes clear to us that although racial discrimination is no longer tolerated; the issue of class is still firmly on the table.

## ★ The Farce

It is in contrast to this stark reality, that the approximate €3.5bn spent on hosting the World Cup comes sharply into focus. The ANC has done everything in their power to airbrush their dirty secret out of the vista of the average football tourist and journalist. Whether it is by building walls around the shack settlements close to Cape Town's international airport, or clamping down on casual traders around the stadia where they make their living, or by banning protest marches for the duration of the World Cup, the ANC are adamant that the spectacle will be unblemished.

## ★ The Opposition

In response to these problems, there has been a huge growth in social movements - the Poor People's Alliance made up of the Landless People's Movement, the Rural Network, the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign and Abahlali baseMjondolo (Zulu for "people based in shacks"). South Africa now has one of the world's highest per capita protest rates. Over the past several years, the country's largest social movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo has been at the forefront of grassroots direct action against inequality.

Emerging in 2005 in the Kennedy Road settlement during the course of a dispute over housing with the local ANC city councilor, the shackdwellers movement has grown to include over 30,000 members in more than thirty informal settlements throughout the province of KwaZulu-Natal. They practice a politics that is of the poor, by the poor and for the poor and reject electoral politics and the interference of NGOs.

They provide practical solidarity in their communities - reconnecting electricity and water supplies and resisting evictions, while also developing a sustained voice for shack dwellers, marching on the offices of local councilors, police stations, municipal offices, newspaper offices and the City Hall in actions that have put thousands of people on the streets. The movement also organised a highly contentious but very successful boycott of the March 2006 local government elections under the slogan "No Land, No House, No Vote".

## ★ The Repression

Naturally, given the interests of the ruling-class in South Africa, Abahlali have faced increasing repression in the past year. On 26th and 27th September 2009, a mob of 500 people attacked the Kennedy Road settlement in Durban, targeting members of Abahlali in particular. Not a single person has been arrested for this violence, yet 12 members of Abahlali are still facing the courts - with no evidence presented thus far. Their next day in court was conveniently set for the day after the World Cup Final. Other members are in hiding since this event, spurious arrests are continuing.

## ★ The Good Example

Abahlali is one of the largest, most inspiring, participatory, non-hierarchical, and direct action oriented social movements existing in the world today. Let us learn from their example.



Find out more:

★ Abahlali baseMjondolo (shackdwellers movement) ★ [www.abahlali.org](http://www.abahlali.org) ★

★ South Africa's anarchists ★ [www.zabalaza.net](http://www.zabalaza.net) ★

*Text slightly edited from [www.wsm.ie](http://www.wsm.ie)*

