

Uniting fair play, 2010 soccer and global solidarity

Why not take the major event of the FIFA World Cup 2010 in South Africa and use it to make the global campaign 'Decent Work for a Decent Life' a reality? **Vasco Pedrina** and **Joachim Merz** show how South African construction workers are linking globally to put this idea into practice.

The Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) has already explored the Olympic Games 2008 in China to further the 'Decent Work for a Decent Life' campaign. Beijing however, put a stop to independent trade unions getting access to Chinese construction sites. This idea however remains on BWI's agenda both in South Africa and for the United European Football Association (UEFA) EURO 2012 in Poland and Ukraine. Only recently, the Polish and Vietnamese governments concluded an agreement for the employment of 100 000 Vietnamese in the construction of new football stadiums!

In South Africa too the campaign is kicking off.

SOUTH AFRICA: 'FAIR GAMES, FAIR PLAY'

The 'Fair Games – Fair Play' campaign falls into the broad ambit of decent work and was launched at the World Social Forum in Nairobi in January 2007.

In the campaign around preparations for the FIFA World Cup 2010 in South Africa apart from BWI, the most important actors are three South African trade unions. The Congress of South African Trade

Unions' (Cosatu) National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) is the biggest with 280 000 members of which 48 000 are construction workers. The others are the Building, Construction and Allied Workers' Union (BCAWU) an affiliate of the National Confederation of Trade Unions (Nactu) and the South African Building and Allied Workers' Organisation (SABAWO) affiliated to Consawu (Confederation of South African Workers' Unions).

Other parties involved in the South African campaign are in Europe, such as the Swedish, Dutch and Belgian building trade unions. The Swiss trade union Unia is playing a particularly active role. It is the biggest trade union in Switzerland with 200 000 members (of which 50% are migrants) and it organises in the building, construction and service sectors. The Swiss Labour Assistance (SLA), a non-governmental organisation servicing Swiss trade unions which is supported by the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland (SPS) is also very active. Both these organisations are central because FIFA, the World Football Association, is based in Switzerland.

The size of the South African World Cup preparations are huge. More than 10 000 construction

workers are currently employed simply to construct and rebuild infrastructure like the 10 stadiums. If we add other infrastructural development like roads, railways (including the Gautrain) and airports this makes easily another 100 000 workers. This is the same amount of people in the entire building industry of Switzerland!

The main problems are low wages, extremely precarious working conditions, widespread employment of unprotected immigrants, the mostly bad occupational health and safety (OHS) regulations and the non-existent control of sub-contractors that often undercut legal minimum wages. It has also been difficult for trade unions to get access to construction sites where they were not reasonably representative.

The 'Fair Games – Fair Play' campaign has several goals. These are to improve working conditions such as a living wage not under R3 000, better OHS regulations, skills training and development, ensuring freedom of association and collective bargaining, as well as strengthening the position of trade unions around recruiting new members and accessing construction sites. The campaign aims to make football a global



The Building and Wood Workers International and South African construction unionists give support to a railway cargo strike in Switzerland in March this year.

driving force for social development and decent work. After all, FIFA propagates its 'social responsibility' using very effective public relations.

The campaign launched in South Africa in the first half of 2007. From August it picked up speed when NUM, BCAWU and SABAWO agreed to cooperate and employ a joint campaigns coordinator.

It did not take too long for the first positive results to be seen. In the first stage, trade unions publicly voiced their criticisms and demands and set out to monitor the labour related practices of the construction companies and consortiums that have won public tenders. In June 2007, the South African construction unions and the FIFA Local Organising Committee (FIFA LOC) signed a memorandum for fair working conditions. Since then, there have been a number of successful strikes and spontaneous work stoppages.

In August and September 2007, 800 construction workers downed tools twice on the site of the *African Renaissance Stadium* in Cape Town. This was followed by a 12-day strike in November 2007 at the *Moses Mabhida Stadium* in Durban. In November 2007 and February and April 2008, 450 construction workers of the *Mbombela Stadium* in Nelspruit struck.

These actions led to substantial wage rise and other extra pay like bonuses and transport allowances. As a result of the Durban strike,

1 200 workers got bonus payments of R6 000 each, totalling R7.2-million. The Nelspruit workers won R12,11 per hour instead of the previous R10,00 per hour and they will get a bonus of 128 hours wages instead of 110 hours. Management has also finally agreed to work with NUM to ensure the signing of a recognition agreement.

Just as much progress was achieved in the field of trade union rights in such areas as the election of worker representatives for the monitoring of OHS regulations. Quite a lot is also happening in the field of trade union recruitment. Since the beginning of the campaign, about 3 300 new members have signed up.

IN EUROPE AND SWITZERLAND

The solidarity of the European building trade unions does not only consist of financial support. Much more is needed. Firstly, there is the importance of transnational corporations, particularly in the construction industry. The Dutch company Royal Bam Group and the French consortium Bouygues are two major international players which have shares in companies in South Africa.

BWI and their member associations have signed an International Framework Agreement with the Royal Bam Group which establishes minimum social standards globally. Now it is vital to monitor compliance with these standards. This has led to the recent

inspection of the construction sites of the Royal Bam Group in Johannesburg and in Port Elizabeth by a BWI-delegation together with the Dutch construction union CNV.

Secondly, it is of great importance that FIFA-headquarters are in Zurich and that the FIFA-president Sepp Blatter is a Swiss citizen. This has made it possible for the trade union Unia and the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions (SGB) to act as a door opener for South African colleagues.

On a one-week visit to Switzerland by a delegation of nine representatives from the three South African construction unions in March 2008, we were able to engineer a meeting with the 'God of World Football', Sepp Blatter. The results exceeded all our expectations.

Blatter promised to support the values of the 'Decent Work for a Decent Life' campaign. He made a commitment to bringing the workers' issues before the South African government and the FIFA LOC, in order to see 'Fair Play' not only on the playing field, but also on the construction sites. He agreed to include trade unions in his next inspection visit to World Cup sites. This will have huge symbolic meaning. Furthermore, he promised to continue the social dialogue and trade union engagement in other continents where major football events will be held.

Thirdly, the visit of the South African trade union delegation to Switzerland clearly showed how important it is to exchange views beyond borders and continents. This was also true of a visit by a Unia youth group to South Africa two years ago. It is surprising to see how in the age of fast capitalist globalisation problems are similar despite differences from country to country, from continent to continent. It is time now to promote

the exchange of best practices amongst trade unionists, to build strong trade unions and to fight for an open and socially just world.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY ANSWERS GLOBALISATION

The integration and globalisation of the world economy restricts opportunities for action more and more in national politics and for trade unions. A key strategy for an effective alternative to capitalist globalisation lies in the massive strengthening of the worldwide trade union movement. Without such a movement fighting back is not possible, at least not one that is socially sustainable.

As it is generally known, working conditions and social institutions are most favourable in countries where there are long-standing trade union traditions and where the unions have a strong position within society. For example, we talk about a 'European Social Model' and not about an American model – this is not without good reason. Just have a look at present organisational levels to understand the challenges we are facing.



Sepp Blatter promised to support the values of the "Decent Work for a Decent Life" campaign

Between 1990 and 2003, trade union membership in the EU-countries dropped from 33.1% to 26.3% – the difference between Sweden, which has the highest membership and France with the lowest level of union organisation is 68%! In the USA, the unionised labour force has dropped from 15.5% to 12.4%. In Latin America, the degree of unionisation hovers below 10% on average, and in Asia and Africa below 5%.

The 10% trade union membership in the South African construction industry is slightly higher but is not spectacular. Under such circumstances and in view of the disaster international capitalism has unleashed, international trade union work is critical.

The campaign 'Fair Games – Fair

Play' is about to become a success story. It gives rise to great hopes even if it is within a modest framework. Even with modest financial and human resources, the campaign clearly shows that international trade union solidarity is worth the effort in order to improve working conditions, to fight for the respect of human and labour rights, to recruit new members and to raise awareness amongst trade union leaders and shop stewards. LB

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New generation and international solidarity: European and Swiss perspective

Forty years have past since the last major cultural and social movement of the 'Generation of 1968'. This generation contributed greatly to the renewal and revitalisation of trade unions, in particular where their leadership managed to climb to top political positions.

The 1968 period sparked the growth of international ideas and experiences such as resistance to the Vietnam war, and against the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile and of Franco in Spain and it had positive effects on the development of the trade union movement.

Nowadays, this generation is about to retire and it faces one last challenge. This is to pass the reins to a new generation who has not experienced social mass movements based on internationalism and so have not developed a political awareness.

This is necessary in view of the fact that workers and employees are faced with the often negative impacts of globalisation. Building an international awareness is one of the biggest and most pressing tasks for young unionists, both among our shop stewards and our employed staff. This is the reason why we want to produce a film on the South African 'Fair Games – Fair Play' campaign to show at each union gathering. The film will be a contribution to international solidarity and we hope we will be able to conquer the hearts and minds of our younger generation!