

the smaller pieces into a powder. The powder is added to a slurry of water and mercury to draw particles of gold together.

Children under ten are most susceptible to mercury poisoning because their brains are still developing. They suffer from headaches, memory loss, twitching eyelids and other neurological problems. Inhaling mercury vapour harms the lungs and causes coughing. Long-term exposure can harm kidneys. 'We struggle to breathe some days. My heart beats faster when I take a day off,' Banga says.

The United Nations Environment Programme estimates that 6 000 tonnes of mercury are released worldwide each year into the air, land, rivers, lakes and seas. Gold mining is the second-largest source of mercury pollution after burning fossil fuels, and in Mozambique the number of prospectors is rising.

Unfortunately for the Zimbabweans, a system has been put in place to ensure they cannot make their fortune.

Mozambicans who were growing bananas until recently, sign over their smallholdings in short-term leases. But in return for being allowed to dig, the Zimbabweans must turn over up to 70% of any gold they unearth.

Some alluvial sites are controlled increasingly by Mozambican policemen. Border troops have been known to raid miners' camps, beating the inhabitants and stealing their share of the proceeds.

The prospectors sell the gold flakes they find to Mozambican dealers for the equivalent of about R55 a gram. The dealers, in turn, collect R88 in Manica, from Lebanese and Israeli buyers who illegally export the gold. It is eventually refined in Switzerland, and ends up on the London market for up to R286 a gram. ¹⁸

Dan McDougall writes for The Sunday Times in London.

Wealth Games or Wealth Gains

India's Commonwealth Games

The 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, India were controversial because facilities had not been completed by the time teams began to arrive.

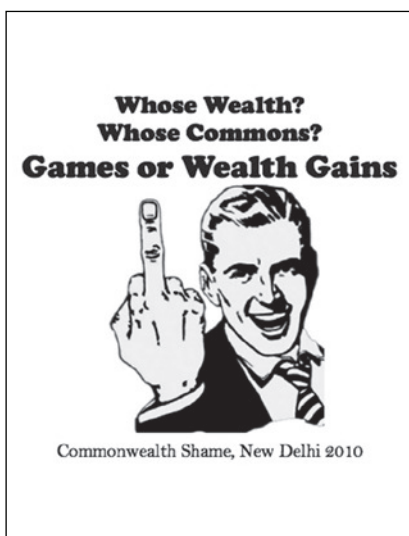
However **Luke Sinwell** writes that they were controversial for a lot more including incurring huge expenses for a country where 40% of the world's hungry live. He argues for the need to mobilise against the ideas underpinning such extravaganzas.

For South Africans, the 2010 World Cup is over. Critical analysts who formed part of an anti-capitalist critique especially concerning the misappropriation of funds are now witnessing the hang-over in the form of the ongoing service delivery protests as well as the 2010 public sector strike. However, the struggle against the bidding for sporting mega-events by 'developing' countries across the globe is far from over.

Delhi in India recently hosted the Commonwealth Games from 3 to 14 October 2010. While there was widespread support for the World Cup in South Africa, the Commonwealth Games have been the subject of far more apprehension by the public.

Serious questions have been raised in India and in the international media about whether the Commonwealth Games will paint a negative picture of India's reputation and deter tourists from visiting. The media criticised the Games, as did the ruling Indian National Congress.

For example, former Union Sports Minister and current Member of Parliament said that the state of people living in poverty opposite the stadiums will not change regardless of who attends the games. He claimed that holding a ten-day event costing nearly 400-billion rupees (R60-billion), 'reflects a misplaced sense of pride and distortion of national priorities'. The decision neglects any sense of social justice by privileging 'a spectacular Games' as promised by the prime minister



at the expense of pressing development needs.

Many other commentators have indicated the devastating effects that the Commonwealth Games brought.

One independent report commissioned by the Housing Land Rights Network laid harsh criticisms against the decision to host the Games. These included the undemocratic and un-transparent decision of the government to host the event, the exploitation and violation of workers' rights for the building of infrastructure, and the ongoing evictions and demolitions of informal settlements in order to make way for 'beautification' of a 'World Class City'.

The executive summary of the report concludes with the following question: 'If India is really looking for genuine and long-lasting national prestige, would this not come if it spent available resources on providing food, housing, education, sanitation, water, and health-care for its population instead of on a mega-sports event?' And finally, it asks: 'In light of the country's harsh social reality, is the exercise of hosting the 2010 Commonwealth Games a justified necessity or an unwarranted extravagance?'

The report points out that

40% of the world's hungry live in India, 46% of children and 55% of women suffer from malnourishment and 450-million people in India live below the poverty line.

According to the United Nations Human Development Index 2009, India ranks low at 134 out of 182 countries (South Africa ranks 129).

The Games in India are the most expensive Commonwealth Games ever – earlier estimates indicated 100 – 300-billion rupees would be spent but the amount kept increasing. The report states that the Games are 'Playing with India's future' as this money could have been used, for example, to provide food security for every man, woman and child in India for a full year.

NEW SOCIALISTS INITIATIVE

Other organisations in New Delhi have actively mobilised to contest the legitimacy of the Commonwealth Games. One of these groups is the New Socialists Initiative (NSI), established in 2008 by students and academics at Delhi University as a platform for the regeneration of revolutionary left politics.

The NSI was critical of mainstream criticisms of the Games since they tended to focus on allegations of corruption and mismanagement without getting to the root cause of the problem:

capitalism. Tara Basumatary, an English teacher and feminist at Delhi University and a leader in the NSI believes there is a 'self-righteous bourgeois tendency to look into issues of national pride and corruption without actually engaging with the very notion of holding a Commonwealth Games [in the first place].'

The NSI engaged in three campaigns prior to the Games.

The first was resistance against forced evictions of students and workers in Delhi's surroundings in June 2010. All student hostels at the university were asked to vacate for the Commonwealth Games organising committee and players. Naveen Chandler, a PhD student and active member of NSI, tells that, 'No teachers or student bodies were consulted about this proposal as the university took this decision on its own'.

Many students were informed during exams. They were suddenly forced to leave their hostels and look for places to stay, but many struggled because of high rents. The NSI saw this as an ongoing problem of shrinking the democratic space within the university and questioned in whose interests the city was being constructed. They concluded it was to build a city for the rich who could afford to go to the stadiums.



image shack

The NSI attempted to connect students in hostels to communities in the surrounding areas, and to ensure the labour rights of workers labouring on the Games since none were given minimum wages. However, students, according to Basumatary, 'have become so concerned about obtaining good marks individually, that most don't get involved in extra-curricular or political activities... Students know about it, but they don't organise around it.'

The second campaign that the NSI engaged in was led by the University Community for Democracy (UCD) and consisted of a hunger strike from 10 to 20 August 2010. The strike sought to conscientise people about the negative effects of the Games and to put pressure on authorities to halt the evictions. In solidarity, teachers took their classes to the hunger-strike site.

Over the ten-day period, 200 people attended the hunger strike each day including journalists and film-makers. People engaged in mass political meetings and those who participated in the hunger strike asked themselves, 'Why should we suffer for someone else's mistake?' The hunger strike gave the campaign 'constant visibility, people were not just sitting there, but we had protest meetings, songs, and other activists and intellectuals who came and joined us,' Basumatary commented.

The third campaign was propaganda against the Commonwealth Games through stickers, buttons and T-shirts. Buttons stated, 'taken for a ride in the name of national pride!' while stickers on doors around Delhi University read, 'Whose Wealth? Whose Commons? Games or Wealth Gains... Common Wealth Shame, New Delhi 2010'. 'Capitalism is killing sport and the rest of us', was another slogan appearing on a T-shirt sold at affordable prices by the UCD.

According to Basumatary the propaganda campaign captured the 'fundamental spirit of what the Commonwealth Games are. Not about developing sports or a culture, but about the accumulation of capital for the few.'

The NSI throughout the campaign were aware that their struggle was not only about a sporting ground or slightly more humane wages, but about global capitalism. They could not stop the Games, and so their focus was on exposing the ways in which the Games had been undemocratically imposed on the majority of people, including those at the university, at their expense and without their consultation.

NEW ORGANISATIONAL FORMS

Over the past months, South Africa and India have witnessed amongst the most expensive international sporting events in history. The enemy which underpins this extravagant expenditure is what we need to continue to fight against as the NSI continues to do. Perhaps their most significant achievement was to use the Commonwealth Games as a platform to conscientise students about the need for an alternative Left politics.

South Africa is perhaps the most unequal country in the world in terms of the income gap between the rich and the poor. There is also increasing recognition that communities and labour, though they are highly mobilised and often militant, are unable to effectively challenge neo-liberalism.

Community-based movements are faced with a deep crisis. The Anti-Privatisation Forum has lost the public image that it once had, key leaders of the Landless People's Movement have become tied to the party politics of the Democratic Alliance and Abahlali in Durban is now a severely fractured movement. The recent spate of service delivery protests over the last year and a half have now become ghosts of the past

as Standerton is quiet and all the evidence of ungovernability left in Balfour is a burnt-down library.

We need new forms of organisation that are can unite a wide spectrum of organisations under a common Left agenda. We need a mass campaign to forward the interests of the working class, that involves students, communities, workers and anyone who will stand in solidarity with this progressive movement for social change.

The most radical upsurge in US history (1967 to 1968) may provide a model for the kinds of changes that are necessary. It sought an alternative value system to capital and acknowledged the obvious, (some of which we have learned from the inability of the Left to challenge mega-sporting events) that people do not give up power and money unless they are forced to do so.

The Poor People's Campaign of 1968 in the US, though it was not successful at achieving its goal, demanded employment and decent wages for all. It was not a march or a display alone and so it recognised the significance of developing and coordinating a strategic plan to force capital to concede. The campaign stopped traffic and people camped out in the capital cities until their demands were met.

The Conference of the Democratic Left (CDL) in South Africa, which has been mobilising communities and workplaces over the past year and a half under an anti-capitalist umbrella holds a national assembly in December. Time will tell if the CDL will be able to coordinate this kind of mass campaign that seems necessary for challenging the strength of capital and its allies. ■

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