

Mass Protest Stops Springboks' Game in New Zealand

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An historic victory against apartheid was won in Hamilton on Saturday, July 25. The anti-tour united front broke through the forces of the state to strike a blow for freedom which will echo around the world. Defying police threats to go in boots and all, 500 militant demonstrators marched on Rugby Park at kick-off time. The front ranks tore down a section of the security fence and 500 poured on to the field before police reinforcements stemmed the tide.

The 500 demonstrators backed together and linked arms in mid-field before police riot squads could be deployed in attack formation. Confronted by this formidable human obstacle the riot squads were ordered to withdraw. The 80-minute occupation of Rugby Park had begun.

Outside the ground, and away from television cameras, the other demonstrators kept up the pressure. Time and time again demonstrators charged up the slopes towards police units blocking the hole in the security fence, only to be forced back by the boot and baton.

After the male members of her family had been injured, a young woman led three charges up the slope. A young worker, already badly knocked around by police batons, kept going back for more.

This united front spirit was shown by all the demonstrators outside the field who kept up the struggle until the moment of final victory -- even though, not being able to see what was happening inside the ground, they thought the crowd noise meant that their comrades had been arrested and the game started.

Midway through the 80-minute struggle, 1,000 demonstrators broke through the security fence on another side of Rugby Park and were halted only by police squads standing behind a barricade of truck and trailer units.

This new offensive forced the scaling down of police arrests inside the ground as police units were diverted to the truck and trailer barricades. The banging on the truck and trailer units reverberated right around the main grandstand.

Inside the ground, the demonstrators were still standing firm despite all the tactics of the police. They rejected all the "easy deals" offered by police officials (like sitting down and being arrested without struggle).

They did not fall for the lies (like being told the tour was off -- if only the Hamilton game could be played). They did not panic when the police said no protection could be guaranteed from pro-tour thugs.

When the police started arresting some of the 500 demonstrators, it took two, three, four and sometimes more cops to drag one demonstrator away from the tightly packed group.

All the time anti-apartheid slogans were being shouted to spectators and the ranks of the demonstrators remained firm....

At 3:20 p.m. the game was officially called off. As the demonstrators moved towards the park exit, scores of fascist thugs among the spectators threw bottles, cans, rocks, fists and boots. The main target seemed to be those least able to defend themselves -- women and young teenagers.

Some spectators, right throughout the 80-minute struggle, spontaneously battled these thugs. What else could they do when they saw their own family, friends and workmates among the demonstrators getting the stick from hooligans? Others publicly expressed their respect for the demonstrators, a sentiment shared by many of the spectators.

Out of the crowd of 28,000, very few joined the fascist terror campaign. Only a handful of the cops at Rugby Park were assigned to "protect" the demonstrators as they left the field -- so the demonstrators pulled together to protect each other.

A timber worker walked out guarding a young woman under each arm. Another local worker, carrying an injured woman, took a savage blow on his face which he could not block.

And a homeowner close to the park risked physical injury and property damage when he spontaneously threw his home open to injured demonstrators.

Finally, all the 500 demonstrators battled their way out of the park grounds and joined the main united front column for a mass march back into town before dispersing.

The thugs they left behind pelted press and television reporters with bottles and cans because they said without "publicity" there would not be an anti-tour movement. A rugby official ripped the copy out of one reporter's typewriter because he didn't like what was written!

All this, combined with the deliberate slanted distortions introduced by their editors, and the difficulties created by the police, must make some reporters question what sort of "freedom of speech" we have in this society.

Fascist thugs were organized for terrorist attacks on the homes and persons of anti-apartheid united front militants on Saturday and Sunday nights. Some have found it necessary to organize a roster of bodyguards for the protection of their families.

But no matter what the forces of reaction do, they cannot hold back the progress of mankind. When the workers become conscious of their role of the gravediggers of capitalism, all the evils of class oppression, such as apartheid, will be wiped out.

And the historic victory against racist sport at Hamilton is a great milestone on the way.