

Against the WCAR

Zabalaza

March 2002

About 20 000 protesters took to the streets of Durban to protest the hypocrisy of the United Nation's World Conference Against Racism, and to raise other issues associated with racism such as poverty, landlessness, religion and globalisation.

On arrival everything seemed quite disorganised and chaotic but everyone was anxious to get going. After a few groups had marched around the fields and a skirmish broke out over free T-shirts, it was time to march. It seemed clear at this point that there was no, or very little, co-ordination between the different groups as to what our objectives really were. Heads of the Durban Social Forum had previously agreed that a memorandum was to be taken to the International Conference Centre (ICC) and that either Thabo Mbeki or UN Secretary General Kofi Anan receive it in person. Was this made clear to everyone present? Had anyone considered what we would do in the event that Mbeki and Anan refused? Not from what I could tell.

The protesters were very lively, singing and dancing to keep themselves motivated whilst others carried colourful banners or juggled on one wheeled bikes and stilts. In all, the turnout was quite impressive and the police presence not too intimidating. Once we began the march, the police filled in just meters behind the last bloc, preventing us from being able to retreat if we had to, but there were few or no roadblocks closing off the roads intersecting our route. The walk was quite uneventful, with one or two unsuccessful attempts to stage a sit down across an intersection to block traffic.

When we arrived at the ICC there were people with loudspeakers preaching religion from on top of their cars and groups of people sitting all over the place. Maybe they were waiting for the revolution to fall from the sky or be given to them by god! It seemed as though we had been led into a dead end. There was a barricade outside the entrance to the conference centre where Mbeki and Anan were expected to receive the memorandum of demands. Apart from the riot police and armoured vehicles there was a huge reel of barbed wire, which had not been utilised. Potentially, had we tried to storm the conference, this could have been seized and used to prevent the police from closing us in from behind. Finding an alternative means of gaining entry to the centre when Anan and Mbeki wouldn't come out was not seriously considered.

An attempt was made to break past the barricade but was stopped when an internal struggle erupted between two members of the Anti-Privatisation Forum. One of whom, a trot, attempted to stop an autonomous comrade from pushing the barricade, but was knocked down by other militants who are understandably tired of constantly delivering memorandums and demands and

then going home to wait for change which doesn't come. It is to such militants that I appeal to act directly against the state, which is using racism in all its manifestations, sexism and xenophobia, not to forget religion of every denomination, to keep us divided and fighting amongst ourselves instead of rising up and reclaiming what rightfully belongs to everyone, equally: the collective ownership and control of the means of production and distribution, to satisfy the needs of all.

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Retrieved on 6th August 2021 from zabalaza.net
Published in *Zabalaza* #2.

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