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# 89<sup>th</sup> Harold Wolpe Dialogue

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Topic:

## THE 2010 LEGACY: EXPLORING THE MYTHS AND REALITIES

Speaker:

**Dr. Dale McKinley**

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The aim of these dialogues is to create a space for open and informed dialogue and debate around key local and global political, social and economic issues facing South Africa.

## South African soccer:

### For the love of the game or for the love of money and power?

Dale T. McKinley

<http://www.sacsis.org.za/site/article/509.1>

The sun has almost set on the Soccer World Cup and its seeming suspension of our South African 'normalcy'. No doubt, many will try their best to continue to bask in its positively proclaimed 'developmental legacy'; but, as sure as the sun will rise on the morning after, so too will the reality of that 'normalcy' bite us like an unhappy dog. Nowhere will this be more apparent than in the world of South African soccer itself.

It is an unfortunate fact of our early 21<sup>st</sup> century existence – whether in South Africa or anywhere else on the globe – that major sports such as soccer, just like most everything else, have become dominated by the need to make, and accumulate, capital and power. Instead of soccer being seen and treated as a necessary and basic recreational/social need and as an integral component of people's overall socio-economic development, we now have a situation where both participation and progress is moulded and ultimately determined by the degree to which these serve individual and commercial interests.

Historically, and particularly in relation to South Africa's past, the beauty of the game of soccer was directly linked to it being, at the most fundamental level, the 'people's game', not a game of commercial prostitution mostly dominated by self-interested bureaucrats, wanna-be soccer kingpins and *prima donna* players. And yet, that is precisely what a large part of South African soccer has become, the trailing exhaust fumes of FIFA and its elitist coterie aside.

It didn't have to be this way though. The seemingly long-forgotten 'Reconstruction and Development Programme' (RDP) acknowledged apartheid's "distortion of sport and recreation in our society [through its] enforced segregation and gross neglect of providing facilities for the majority of South Africa's people [which] has denied millions of people and particularly our youth the right to a normal and healthy life". It went on to rightfully point out that such facilities should be made "available to all South African communities" and that "sport and recreation should cut across all developmental programmes and be accessible and affordable for all South Africans [with] particular attention paid to the provision of facilities at schools and in communities where there are large concentrations of unemployed youth". Yet, in the sixteen years since, these fine words have, for the most part, remained in the realm of stated principles and proposed policy when it comes to addressing the recognised development needs of soccer.

There are two main, and inter-connected, reasons for this. On the one hand, a lack of political will on the part of government to make the national sport a public concern by actively transforming – through institutional/fiscal support and policy intervention – the developmental deficit, infrastructural needs and material