

Behind the glamour of international sports events: The broken bodies of workers



By Al Neal

Behind the glamour of major sporting events and global competitions lay the mangled, scarred, and broken bodies of the workers—low-wage slaves—who make it possible for us to enjoy such visceral entertainment.

And the body count in Qatar, sight of the 2022 FIFA world cup, continues to rise. Thousands of migrant workers from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka have died over the past decade while building Qatar's 2022 World Cup stadium.

Despite recent changes to Qatar's labor laws, Sept. 8, 2020—including a standard minimum wage and removing migrant workers' need for employer approval to change jobs—issues remain with such a transition and how effectively the government enforces and consistently applies the new labor laws. Meaning not much has changed for migrant workers and advocating for worker rights can be life-threatening.

Malcolm Bidali, 28, a Kenyan security guard working at the 2022 FIFA stadium site, was detained by Qatar security forces, May 4, according to supporters. His crime? "Violating Qatar's security laws and regulations," the Qatari government said in response to questions from the Associated Press.

Bidali spoke up for his fellow workers. That was the violation.

Using the pen name "Noah," Bidali wrote about the working and living conditions for migrant workers. And about his efforts to try and improve his worker accommodations. He did not bite his tongue when it came to describing the packed bedrooms of his workers—with up to 10 workers in a small room, and the frustration of being unable to afford the "luxury of privacy" enjoyed by white-collar western expatriots and Qataris.

"Why should intimacy, and even family life,

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be reserved for the privileged nationalities and financially affluent?" he asked in one article.

Bidali worked 12-hour days, six days a week, and earned poverty wages. Recently, security guards at two Qatar companies went out on strike over pay and labor issues. Under Qatar's trade union law,

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only nationals with the General Union of Workers in Qatar have the right to strike.

These restrictive trade union laws stem from the recurring strikes of workers in the Qatar Petroleum Company taking place in 1957 and led to the outlaw of all trade unions in the country. It stayed that way until 2004 when the government ruled workers would be allowed to organize unions once again.

The Kenyan Embassy in Qatar did not respond to requests for comments.

A coalition of organizations working on the rights of migrant workers in Qatar – Migrant-Rights.org, FairSquare, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Business & Human Rights Resource Centre – have contacted various Qatari authorities in the weeks since Malcolm's arrest.

While the cause of his detention remains unclear, Bidali spoke and briefly appeared in a video conference with civil society and trade unions describing his situation. Activists watching say Bidali clicked on a questionable internet link during

the call. The Gulf Arab States often use spyware and malware to hack and monitor local activists and dissenters, but it is unclear who, if anyone, targeted Bidali.

“Since arriving in Qatar three years ago Malcolm has been on the front line of the fight to reform Qatar's labor laws, including by writing about his experiences as a migrant worker in the country. It has now been more than a week since anyone heard from Malcolm, and we are extremely concerned for his well-being,” said the coalition.

In cowardly move, GOP Leader McCarthy tries to sink Jan. 6 commission

By John Wojcik

As expected by anyone who has paid attention to the way Republicans have operated for many years now, GOP House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy announced Monday that he is against what has been touted as a bi-partisan proposal to form an independent commission to investigate the Jan. 6 insurrection. His move will reduce Republican support for the measure in the House.

Republicans negotiated with Democrats to come up with the bill, successfully watering it down to essentially give the GOP members of the commission the ability to issue their own subpoenas and cancel things the Democrats want. Just like countless prior negotiations where the GOP waters down a Democratic proposal but then proceeds to vote against it anyway, this is what McCarthy has now made clear he will try again.

McCarthy is making the absurd demand that he wants the commission to examine a lot more than the events of Jan. 6. His idea is that the panel not probe the involvement of GOP lawmakers in the planning and execution of the insurrection, but rather that it investigate Antifa and Black Lives Matter. The outrageous implication is that peace-

ful demonstrations against police killings and for civil rights can be equated with a violent insurrection aimed at overthrowing the government.

But House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the top Republican on the House Homeland Security Committee who drafted the plan have both rejected that McCarthy demand. GOP Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, who was ousted from party leadership because of her refusal to endorse the Big Lie, said McCarthy was displaying “cowardice” because he fears any commission that is formed would call him to testify. McCarthy was the only lawmaker to actually speak by phone with Trump while the insurrection was happening. During that conversation, he was heard insisting that the uprising was orchestrated by and being led by Trump supporters.

The GOP leader's opposition, in addition to resulting in less Republican support in the House, dims its chances in the evenly divided Senate. McCarthy's opposition, along with the pushing of two Big Lies—one that Trump won the election and the other that Jan. 6 was little more than a gathering of tourists—are part of the same policy of denial the GOP as a whole is pushing.

Again a GOP leader pushed to water down a Democratic proposal and, after the Dems agree, says he is opposed anyway.

D.C. joins list of cities protesting for Palestine



By Wes Vanderburgh

Hundreds of protesters filled the National Mall on Saturday to demonstrate their solidarity with Palestinians all over the world on the 73rd anniversary of the Nakba. “Nakba” means “Catastrophe,” and refers to the Palestinian point of view on the Palestine War and founding of Israel in 1948, which resulted in the forced displacement of thousands and set the stage for perennial violence in the region.

Saturday’s protest was organized by the Palestinian Youth Movement, a nationwide organization uniting Palestinian youth into a force for peace in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the worldwide diaspora. The organization released a joint statement together with other North American Palestinian groups condemning the recent violence.

Protesters congregated at the eastern side of the Washington Monument at 3 p.m. There was a long speaking program featuring representatives of many prominent Palestinian organizations as well as messages of solidarity offered by other groups. A march then proceeded through the National Mall and down Constitution Avenue toward the National Archives.

The energy of solidarity was palpable. The diversity of the crowd highlighted the salience of the issue of U.S.-backed Israeli violence. Chants could be heard in English, Spanish, and Arabic. Many non-Palestinian speakers talked of the indivisibility of anti-oppression struggles the world over. And many others turned to faced the direction of the White

House to remind President Joe Biden that the U.S. government continues to fund Israeli state violence.

The protest occurred against the backdrop of intensifying violence following Israeli forced settlement in the East Jerusalem neighborhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan earlier this month. Since then, there have been relentless bombing campaigns and reports of police-sanctioned violence and vigilante mobs targeting Palestinians. As of this writing, well over 200 people have been killed, thousands wounded, and upward of 40,000 displaced from their homes. Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pledged to continue bombing the Gaza Strip. In retaliation, Hamas militants in Gaza continue firing rockets into Israel.

This weekend’s escalation of violence comes after Israeli bombs destroyed the Gaza City building housing the Associated Press and Al Jazeera as well as several residential apartments on Saturday.

International outrage has been swift and unequivocal, and the protests in Washington were one of many happening in major cities around the world.

Despite the mass demonstrations, most Western leaders continue to back Israel. The U.S., Germany, and the U.K. have all reiterated their support for what they call Israel’s “right to self-defense” while offering lukewarm pleas for the violence against Palestinian civilians to cease. At an emergency session of the U.N. Security Council, the U.S. blocked the passage of a resolution, despite the appearance of consensus of the other member nations.

Hundreds filled the National Mall to show solidarity with Palestinians on the 73rd anniversary of the Nakb.

LOCAL NEWS

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New satellite network to locate and monitor methane super-emitters

By Climate Nexus

Less than three years after California governor Jerry Brown said the state would launch “our own damn satellite” to track pollution in the face of the Trump administration’s climate denial, California, NASA, and a constellation of private companies, nonprofits, and foundations are teaming up to do just that.

Under the umbrella of the newly-formed group Carbon Mapper, two satellites are on track to launch in 2023. The satellites will target, among other pollution, methane emissions from oil and gas and agriculture operations that account for a disproportionate amount of pollution.

Between 2016 and 2018, using airplane-based instruments, scientists found 600 “super-emitters” (accounting for less than 0.5% of California’s infrastructure) were to blame for more than one-third of the state’s methane pollution. Now, the satellite-based systems will be able to perform similar monitoring, continuously and globally, and be able to attribute pollution to its source with previously impossible precision.

“These sort of methane emissions are kind of like invisible wildfires across the landscape,” Carbon Mapper CEO and University of Arizona research scientist Riley Duren said. “No one can see them or smell them, and yet they’re incredibly damaging, not just to the local environment, but more importantly, globally.”

Mujeres esencialmente heroicas

BY JAVIER SIERRA

La próxima vez que comas fruta o verdura, da las gracias a las campesinas que se parten el espinazo recolectándolas en condiciones inhumanas. Calor extremo, exposición a pesticidas, abusos sexuales y vulnerabilidad a COVID-19 contribuyen a que el trabajo de estas mujeres sea de los más arriesgados del país.

En el caso de los graves peligros del calor excesivo, el ganado goza de más protecciones que las campesinas. Entre 1992 y 2017, las altas temperaturas causaron la muerte de 815 trabajadores y enfermaron gravemente a más de 70.000. Quienes más sufren esta amenaza son los campesinos y campesinas, debido a su agotadora labor de sol a sol, sin acceso a agua fresca, lugares con sombra ni descansos obligatorios. Las altas temperaturas y la deshidratación pueden causar males respiratorios, cerebrales y cardiovasculares, golpe de calor y la muerte.

Estas heroicas campesinas arriesgan también su salud al estar expuestas a pesticidas de gran toxicidad. Según la ANC, cada año, se aplican 1,1 millones de libras de pesticidas y herbicidas en Estados Unidos, lo cual causa hasta 20.000 envenenamientos. Esta exposición puede causar cáncer, infertilidad y trastornos neurológicos.

“Los campesinos y campesinas sufren más enfermedades de origen químico que cualquier otro grupo laboral del país”, dice Milly Treviño-Sauceda, directora ejecutiva de la ANC. “En California, por ejemplo, hay comunidades campesinas cuyos hijos tienen necesidades médicas especiales por la exposición a los pesticidas de sus madres”.

Calor extremo y exposición a los pesticidas, sin embargo, no son los únicos peligros que confrontan estas mujeres. Según un estudio de la Universidad de California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), hasta el 80% de ellas ha sufrido acoso sexual.

“Esto es algo perverso. Es muy rara la compañía agrícola que no ha tenido problemas de acoso sexual. Como están apartadas en los campos, el muy fácil violar y ultrajar”, dice Treviño-Sauceda.

El estudio de la UCSC también indica que menos del 7% del total de casos de abusos se reporta, ya que la inmensa mayoría de ellas carece de estatus migratorio legal y que hasta el 97% de las que lo reportan sufre represalias de los abusadores o empleadores.

“En muchísimas compañías vimos que no se tomaron las necesarias precauciones para evitar contagios y debido a que muchas carecen de seguro médico, fueron a trabajar enfermas”, dice Treviño-Sauceda.

Las consecuencias han sido terribles. Un estudio de Purdue University concluyó que unos 9.100 trabajadores agrícolas han muerto de unos 554.000 casos de COVID-19.

“¡Ya basta!”, clama la ANC y exige que se tomen soluciones para acabar con estos abusos, como la aprobación de la Ley de Prevención de Enfermedades y Muertes por Calor, la Ley de Protección de los Niños contra los Pesticidas, la Ley de Prevención de Violencia contra las Mujeres y la Ley de Ciudadanía para Trabajadores Esenciales.

La sociedad se lo debe a estas campesinas por ser esencialmente heroicas.

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