

AND – World Cup in Qatar: Imperialism achieves super- profits on top of death and exploitation of workers

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World Cup in Qatar: Imperialism achieves super-profits on top of death and exploitation of workers



FIFA, local ruling classes and imperialists super-exploited workers in the run-up to the sports festival. Photo: Marwan Naamani/AFP/Getty Images

On November 28, the secretary of the World Cup Committee in Qatar, Hassan Al-Thawadi, stated that around 500 workers died

in the various preparations for the football festival in the country. The rest of the Committee, desperate to get around the situation, contradicted the secretary himself and claimed that the figure is for all work-related deaths in the country between 2014 and 2020. Al-Thawadi's confession came to light after years of reports of over-exploitation and death that affected thousands of workers in the innumerable constructions for the preparation of the Fifa world cup – an organisation that exploits the most popular sport on the planet in order to enrich its own leaders and to increase the profits of a handful of imperialist monopolies associated with it.

The figures released by the reactionary Hassan Al-Thawadi are added to other statistics on the death of workers in Qatar. In 2021, media monopoly The Guardian reported that 6,500 migrant workers had died in the Asian country since its announcement as host country for the 2022 World Cup. In the same year, a report by Amnesty International said 15,021 migrants had died in the country between 2010 and 2019.

Qatar's theocratic-feudal regime, as if wanting to reduce the gravity of the situation, responded to the reports by stating that these were not deaths of workers directly involved in the World Cup construction work, but of all workers and immigrants who had died in the country in the time period analysed. Thus, in an attempt to absolve Fifa and the World Cup of responsibility for the deaths, the reactionary Qatari government confirmed the widespread existence of pre-capitalist labour relations, responsible for the over-exploitation and murder of thousands of workers, which underpins the theocratic-feudal Qatari regime, a servant of imperialism.

At the expense of throwing the native and immigrant workers to their death in the mega-businesses of the powerful, the old Qatari state is going after the super-profits that will come from the world championship, the tourist investments and the widespread corruption that will benefit Fifa, the imperialist

monopolies and a very small number of sheiks – landowners, big bourgeois and top bureaucrats of the theocratic-feudal state apparatus.

DEATHS AND OVER-EXPLOITATION IN QATAR

The Qatari workforce is almost entirely made up of immigrant workers. Currently, around 88% of the country's population is made up of such immigrants, mainly from countries such as Nepal, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. These workers come to Qatar through employment agencies, at which point exploitation begins.

The agencies offer the workers well-paid employment contracts in Qatar, but demand, in advance, payment of import taxes, medical examinations, passports, visas and even flight tickets. To meet the payments, workers often go into debt to the agencies or to imperialist banks in their home countries.

Once in Qatar, the workers discover that the contracts for well-paid jobs were fake. In fact, a large proportion of these workers are then subjected to the so-called "Kafala labour regime", which was in force in the country until 2020 and was already known to Fifa when Qatar was chosen to host the World Cup. Under this regime, workers migrating to Qatar need a "sponsor" to get a visa to stay and work in the country.

In the vast majority of cases, the workers' "sponsors" end up being the employers themselves, who then become responsible for the visa and the employee's legal status in the country. Thus, all of the worker's basic rights, such as changing jobs and returning home, become dependent on the approval of the employer, who must grant a "certificate of non-objection".

The system also allows for various abuses by employers acting in the service of imperialist companies, such as the confiscation of passports, the imposition of long working hours and the withholding of wages to pay off debts for the

worker's transfer and accommodation. Despite the banning of Kafala in 2020, thousands of migrants are still forced to work under the rules.

In addition to the Kafala system, until 2020 Qatar had a total absence of several other basic rights which favoured the overexploitation of workers in the country: the Qatari labour legislation did not have the determination of a minimum wage to be paid to workers nor a limit on daily working hours. However, just like the abolition of the Kafala system, the other changes in the labour legislation (application of the minimum wage and the number of working hours), were neither followed by the imperialist monopolies exploiting the workers in the country nor supervised by the institutions of the old Qatari state.

Under these working conditions, the immigrants in Qatar were forced to work an average of 14 hours a day in temperatures reaching around 50°C. Lunch breaks were extremely short, often limited to a few minutes for food. Workers working on scaffolding were punished by employers when they climbed down from the structure to drink water or rest from the sun. After work, the workers were taken to lodgings far from the city, where they slept in small, overcrowded rooms (around 13 workers per room in some cases) and without the slightest hygiene conditions. Cockroaches were often found in the rooms and mattresses.

These conditions are not only imposed on projects carried out by Qatari companies or on Fifa stadiums, but also by imperialist companies operating in the country. In 2016, Qatari migrant workers accused British companies of committing various abuses, from withholding payments to confiscating passports and housing workers in substandard conditions.



Workers were forced to stay in overcrowded rooms in Qatari accommodation. Photo: Pete Pattison/The Guardian



Canteen in Qatari accommodation. Photo: Pete Pattison/The Guardian

It was under these miserable working conditions of the old theocratic-feudal Qatari state, supported relentlessly by the imperialists in their lust for super-profits, that thousands

of workers perished in the overcrowded construction sites and quarters. These deaths, which the old Qatari state sought to disguise in generic terms as “cardiorespiratory arrest”, were in fact due to exhaustion and heat stroke, as investigations among the workers have shown.

WORLD CUP IN QATAR: THE SPREE OF FIFA AND THE IMPERIALISTS

Besides the stadiums, several other investments occurred in the country to host the World Cup. The number of hotels in the country grew from 66 in 2010 to 109 in 2019. The country’s goal was to build 130,000 hotel rooms to host the tourists who would arrive in the country to watch the festival. Many of these investments were made in deals with imperialist companies.

Companies from at least 43 countries have invested in Qatar in recent years alone. The United States (USA) leads the way, with 69 Yankee imperialist companies with new investments in Qatar, such as Google, Microsoft and hotel chains like Centara, Hilton and Marriott. Britain is second in number of companies with investments in the country. In total, 31 British imperialist companies invest in the World Cup host country.

In 2018, British imperialist firms estimated that they would profit more than £1.5 billion from World Cup investments. By that year, the profit had already been £940 million.

England is the country that historically dominated Qatar, with influence in the region since the 19th century, and which still exerts a deep domination in the country. Qatar is England’s biggest arms buyer and even today the military and monarchs of the Asian country are trained by the British army.

Side by side with imperialist corporations, Fifa, which in its definition is a “non-profit institution”, has calculated

profits of \$7.2 billion (R\$ 37.5 billion) for Qatar's four-year World Cup cycle (2018-2022). The figure represents an increase of \$1.1 billion (R\$ 5.7 billion) compared to the last four-year World Cup cycle in Russia.

The amount accumulated by Fifa also represents a significant increase if compared to the profits accumulated with the Cup in South Africa (2010), which were around R\$ 3.2 billion in the cycle between 2007 and 2010 and another R\$ 19 billion in contracts made during 2010, and with the World Cup in Brazil (2014), which earned R\$ 16 billion for the entity at the service of the imperialists.

The actions of Fifa, imperialist companies and local monopoly companies have made it clear that the crimes against the people as a result of the World Cup are not exclusive to Qatar. Also in Brazil and South Africa cases of exploitation of workers, destruction of schools, removal of thousands of people from their homes (over 80,000 families in Brazil) and strong repression against those who dared to stand up and oppose the festival have exploded.

The exorbitant profits of the 2022 World Cup represent an important particularity of the current moment, in which imperialism is facing the most serious crisis in its history. In the midst of this crisis, the imperialists, the Qatari sheiks and the Fifa tycoon leaders are using the World Cup in a country with a theocratic-feudal regime in order to exponentially increase their profits and export their capital in the form of new investments in the Arab country. All this at the expense of the most basic rights and the lives of thousands of immigrant workers forced to work in bondage regimes and in the midst of a serious general crisis of imperialism.