

Biden continues cover-up of Key Bridge disaster in visit to Baltimore

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5 April 2024

US President Joe Biden took an aerial tour of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge on Friday before delivering comments to the media about the disaster that killed six immigrant construction workers and halted shipping in the Port of Baltimore.

Biden's comments were entirely predictable and based largely upon what the administration has said previously about the catastrophic collapse. The disaster was caused by the container ship *Dali*, which struck one of the bridge's primary support structures in the Patapsco River on March 26.

He began by feigning sympathy for the families and loved ones of the workers who died as they were fixing potholes on the bridge when it went down at 1:30 a.m. Using well-worn phrases that he has delivered at every avoidable US disaster that has killed people, Biden said he knows "a little bit about what it's like to lose a piece of your soul."

While the president was scheduled to meet with families of the deceased Latino workers—the bodies of three have yet to be recovered after they were buried alive in the debris under the water—nothing was reported in the media about it. Biden's real sentiments were on display as he joked before the assembled politicians and media and by the fact that he timed the stop in Baltimore to coincide with his trip from the White House to his vacation home in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, for the weekend.

The three deceased workers whose bodies have been recovered are Dorlian Castillo Cabrera, 26, from Guatemala; Alejandro Hernandez Fuentes, 35, from Mexico; and Maynor Yasir Suazo-Sandoval, 38, from Honduras. The others whose bodies remain in the wreckage are Miguel Luna from El Salvador, Jose Mynor Lopez, 35, from Guatemala and a sixth worker whose name and age have not been determined.

The president then quickly moved on and said, "[w]e will not rest until the cement has dried on a new bridge" and boasted about the administration's response to the disaster. He also claimed without going into details, "we're going to continue to have your backs every step of the way, I guarantee it."

The two priorities of the US ruling establishment regarding the Key bridge collapse were conveyed by Biden, the first by what he did say and the second by what he did not say. He said, "Our first priority is to open the port," that is, to overcome supply chain disruptions and resume shipping through the harbor so that capitalist profit-making can be resumed as quickly as possible.

Biden emphasized that the port had to be reopened because it is costing US corporations money. He said, "But, folks, we all need to step up. Amazon, Home Depot, Domino Sugar, and many other companies all rely on this port. And they have committed to keep workers and payrolls on their—and their businesses in Baltimore and [as we] move as quickly and clearly as possible to clear the channel."

At the same time, Biden did not say anything about a federal government investigation into the cause of the bridge collapse or discuss any of the details about how it happened. Through his silence on this question, the president made it clear that the cover-up of the disaster will continue, and the White House has no intentions of holding anyone responsible for it.

Even though experts have exposed over the past 10 days that a combination of corporate profit-making and government negligence is responsible for the disaster, Biden presented the bridge collapse as a positive thing. He said, "We're the only nation that has gone through every crisis that we've had—we come out stronger than we went in. And we're going to do it here as well."

While he was preoccupied with the concerns of the multibillion-dollar corporations, he had nothing to say about the impact of the bridge collapse on the working class.

He did not mention the crew members of the *Dali* who are still on the 984-foot container ship with its bow partially smashed by a collapsed bridge section. There are 21 crew on board—20 from India and one from Sri Lanka—who are continuing to perform ship duties while answering questions from investigators about what happened on the morning of March 26.

One of the crew members was injured during the bridge collapse and was taken to a local hospital for treatment before he was released and transported back on board the *Dali*. The ship was on its way to Sri Lanka and had on board at least 56 containers (764 tons) of hazardous material, including corrosives, flammables and lithium ion batteries. When the ship was damaged by the bridge collapse, some of these HAZMATs spilled into the water.

The container ship and several others stranded around the port were without internet service for four days, until a salvage ship delivered Wi-Fi hotspots donated by the Baltimore International Seafarers' Center so the crew members could communicate with their loved ones back home.

Biden also said nothing about the layoffs that have already taken place and the impact on workers who relied on the Key Bridge each day to get to and from work.

Last week, an Amazon worker told the WSWS that some workers at the Port of Baltimore have been furloughed, citing one of his relatives. He did not know exactly what positions were laid off, but he said it is possibly longshoremens.

The worker said some workers at Amazon are worried about potential shift eliminations or the closing of the Tradepoint Atlantic facility, or one of the three Amazon facilities in the southeastern region of Baltimore. Since Amazon busses many workers from Anne Arundel County over to Sparrow's Point, without the bridge, the buses will have to take alternate routes, through the traffic-snarled I-95 or I-895 tunnels or through the city of Baltimore.

A second worker said Amazon was being lenient with unpaid time off last week. She said Amazon would just change the shift times once it sorts out the shuttle

situation or rely on voluntary time off to deal with any slack in things coming through.

The Tradepoint Atlantic section of the port is operational and started receiving ships as of last week, because it is on the Chesapeake Bay side of the wreckage, as opposed to the Port proper located inside the Patapsco River and trapped by the wreckage. This worker estimated it will take 5-7 years before the bridge is rebuilt. She said something like 20 percent of staff was using the bridge to get to her Amazon facility, and now traffic is "a mess."

She said, "One guy said he was just called into overtime. All he does is drive cars off boats and park them. But if the boats can't get through, they got to find other ways, so now they're working overtime to compensate to accommodate different ways.

"They just called a bunch of mandatory overtime for some of the dockworkers because now they have to accommodate differently. The day after the collapse, a coworker of mine was two hours late to work because there was a truck that broke down in the tunnel, and it stopped traffic for both lanes. They had to wait for someone to come and get it and tow it out."

Another worker discussed the traffic situation and how it has added time to his commute. Asked about the workers who died in the bridge collapse, this worker said they were from Honduras, El Salvador and Mexico, "Just imagine, that is a port, and everything that comes out of that port, and just imagine all that stuff that's on the boats, and one carrier, and they load it up to the top. Those carriers go all the way around the world, so this is going to impact not just us, but the whole world."



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