

Billionaire Bezos's cash bonanza

Amazon CEO makes \$3.3 billion in a few hours

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Last Thursday evening, Amazon's billionaire CEO Jeff Bezos made \$3.3 billion when the tech giant reported its eighth consecutive profitable quarter, adding \$50 a share to the value of its stock in after-hours trading.

To acquire \$3.3 billion, a US Amazon worker making the average \$12.41/hour would have to work 133,064 years—roughly the length of time modern humans have lived on Earth. It would take Amazon workers in China, Brazil, India, and Mexico who are paid even lower wages much longer than that.

If the entire 200,000 person Amazon workforce in the US began working on January 1 at this wage, they would make a collective \$3.3 billion in wages only at the end of August. A US warehouse worker would have to work almost two weeks just to make enough to buy a single share of Amazon stock (worth about \$940)—and that's before tax!

Bezos's evening bonanza brings his net worth to \$80.6 billion, making him the third wealthiest person on Earth. Bezos is poised to become the world's richest person by year's end.

Among the world's billionaires, Bezos has experienced the largest growth in his personal wealth so far this year, adding \$15.3 billion since January 1, according to the *Bloomberg Billionaires Index*. Over the past year, Bezos has earned \$22.4 billion, and in the last five years he has earned an astounding \$62.5 billion.

To put this in perspective, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimates that it would cost roughly \$51 billion—\$11.5 billion *less* than Bezos has earned in five years—to provide access to water and sanitation for the entire global population, which would save millions of lives annually.

The average Amazon warehouse worker in the US makes roughly \$25,792 each year before tax. Thus, in the

past year, Bezos earned 868,486 times the average Amazon worker, and over the past five years he has earned nearly this same amount, \$23,782, *per minute*.

Amazon and Bezos exercise an inordinate amount of control on the political system. In 2016, Amazon's Political Action Committee gave hundreds of thousands of dollars to 129 congressmen—29.6 percent of the total—and 35 senators, both split almost evenly between both Democratic and Republican representatives. Bezos also owns one of the country's most influential newspapers, the *Washington Post*.

Bezos's billions and his influence come through the exploitation of the hundreds of thousands of Amazon workers worldwide, who go to work each day and produce far more value for the company than they receive in wages. This is where the company's profit comes from.

In all the countries in which it operates, Amazon is engaged in efforts to suck its workers dry of every penny of profit. In Germany, Amazon recently implemented a new policy of collective punishment for its workforce aimed at dissuading workers from taking sick days that they have the right to under German law.

The policy stipulates that workers are eligible for a group bonus of 6-10 percent only if the entire group has used a minimum amount of sick days. This pits workers against one another and places immense pressure on individuals not to take time off to recover from illness for fear of being blamed for taking away their coworkers' bonuses.

Over the last five years, Amazon's revenue has increased more than the cost of revenue (which includes labor costs). That means that each year, the level of exploitation at Amazon increases while workers receive a smaller proportion of Amazon's gross profit. From 2012 to 2016, the difference between the company's total

revenue and the cost of revenue, including labor costs, increased from \$15.12 billion in 2012 to \$47.72 billion in 2016. That's tens of billions of dollars of wealth that workers produce but will never see.

Behind the billions of dollars on the company's balance sheets are the lives of the hundreds of thousands of Amazon workers whose daily economic struggles are funding Bezos's lavish lifestyle.

Last October, he bought Washington DC's largest house—a 27,000-square-foot former textile museum—for \$23 million in cash. To purchase just a single square foot of Bezos' mansion, an Amazon worker making \$12.40 an hour would have to work 68.7 hours.

The house has 14 bathrooms, 10 bedrooms, and 11 fireplaces. Bezos's nearby neighbors include Barack Obama and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, as well as Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump.

Bezos's wealth is not a product of individual "greed," it is a product of the capitalist system, which is based on the private ownership of the means of production by a tiny sliver of the world's population which increases its wealth through the exploitation of the working class of the world.

It is the working class, at Amazon and in all industries and workplaces, which produces society's wealth. The Socialist Equality Party calls for the nationalization of Amazon and all major corporations, the seizure of the wealth of the rich, and its redistribution to meet the needs of the human race.

This requires a *political* struggle for the unity of the working class of all nationalities against the corporations and the political parties and governments they control, as well as against their wars for corporate plunder. The *World Socialist Web Site* encourages all Amazon workers to share this article as widely as possible on social media and to contact us to learn more about the fight for socialism.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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