

Amazon workers ask “\$100 billion man” Jeff Bezos: where’s my cut?

Our reporters
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Late last month, it was revealed that Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos’ personal wealth had exceeded the \$100 billion mark after Black Friday shopping sales drove Amazon stock to new heights. Bezos is now the richest man on Earth, surpassing the former-richest man, Microsoft founder Bill Gates, by over \$10 billion.

When reporters for the *International Amazon Workers Voice* interviewed part-time Amazon “associates” (a cheap euphemism for “employees” used to disguise the exploitative relationship between workers and management at the company) in Baltimore to discuss their attitude toward Bezos’ fortune, they were met with a torrent of disgust, calls for sharing the wealth, and social anger.

“Tell Mr. Bezos and the rest of management to come out of their offices and get on the shop floor” said one worker who identified herself as a single mother of two. “At the end of the day, they never feel what we go through in a day for \$12 an hour. They get to sit down in their offices and get paid more than we will see in a year,” she said.

Bezos’ wealth typifies the way an increasingly small number of multi-billionaire CEOs and finance operatives extract ever more obscene sums from the international workforce. This process of ever-increasing wealth for the few and exploitation for the majority is reaching a political breaking point.

Explaining her work environment during the holidays, the working mother said, “they just had us move 100,000 packages in 5 hours, and at the end we aren’t even paid enough to take care of our kids. I’m a single mother, I don’t receive food stamps. My rent is \$850 a month. I have to pay for gas, electricity, bus passes, plus raise two kids.

“If we decided to quit, who would move these packages out of the door?” she said, noting the social

power of the workers employed by the company. “We are the ones making you rich.”

A worker named S. in Baltimore readily agreed with the IAWV’s call for expropriating Bezos’ wealth, stating that she and her fellow workers were “overworked and underpaid.” S. found the WSWS figures showing that world hunger could be eliminated with a mere fraction of Bezos’ fortune particularly sickening. Dozens of other workers stopped to take leaflets, many rhetorically asking “where’s our cut?” as they passed by.

Bezos is not alone in the super-exploitation of the working population. According to a study published by the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) last month, more than half the wealth in the United States is monopolized by just three individuals, an unprecedented demonstration of the US’s oligarchic character.

Amazon has selected Baltimore as a shipping hub for its merchandise. Last month, reports surfaced showing that Amazon was looking to build its fourth distribution center in the Baltimore region, this time on the site of the old Bethlehem Steel mill, at one point the largest steel manufacturing plant in the world. Utilizing Baltimore for its history in the shipping and manufacturing industries, Amazon is taking advantage of the depressed city’s population in order to create a low-paid and hyper-exploited workforce.

“It’s very, very tough. We’re treated like a robot in that place,” said another worker, who did not want to give his name for fear of retribution. The worker stated that he opposed many of Amazon’s policies, such as needing to have “time, if you want to get off.”

“If I have zero hours left to take sick leave, and I get sick, they will not let me go home. I will be fired,” he stated, adding that he’d seen people “get really sick” while working and still not be allowed to leave.

Glen, a worker for a temp agency that has a contract with Amazon, said he felt “lucky” to be one of the few people able to work full time through his temp agency. Other workers are taken on in seasonal cycles and most can only hope for full time work. Glen was shocked at the news of Bezos’ \$100 billion: “Workers out here are robbing Peter to pay Paul, but he’s got all that money.”

Glen felt that workers needed to do something but felt that “unionizing makes no difference. They always serve the employers, help them use and abuse the workers, or shut them up when they want change.” An IAWV reporter explained that workers needed to build new organizations of workers to replace the old unions in order to prosecute their interests, in addition to a complete political break with both parties.

As it was recently noted by the *World Socialist Web Site* in a perspective about Bezos’ ill-gotten wealth, “The accumulation of such immense wealth is proof that the conditions for the socialist transformation of the world are pregnant in the present situation.”

The *International Amazon Workers Voice* calls on all Amazon workers to write in to the site in order form rank and file workers’ committees to take forward the struggle against the exploitation at their company as well as work to unite the entire working class internationally against the capitalist system as a whole.



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