

Spain's Amazon workers call first ever strike at Madrid hub

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Amazon workers in Spain's capital, Madrid, are set to strike on Wednesday and Thursday against planned cuts to pay and reduced allowances for overtime. It is the first strike to hit Amazon in Spain.

Support for the planned 48-hour strike is overwhelming. Seventy-five percent of the workforce voted last week for strike action to maintain current rights. This follows similar action by Amazon workers in Italy, Germany and France during November's Black Friday sales.

The 77,000-square-meter warehouse in San Fernando de Henares is the oldest and largest Amazon facility in Spain. It employs 1,100 permanent staff, 900 temporary workers and holds 165 million products.

Amazon dominates the country's e-commerce market, which is worth an estimated €22 billion annually. Launched in Spain in 2011, the company invested €240 million there in 2016 alone.

For more than a year, Amazon has been negotiating with the unions—CGT, CCOO, UGT and CSIT—to impose the Provincial Collective Agreement of Logistics and Packing of the Madrid Region, which would replace the previous warehouse agreement and drastically reduce workers' rights.

Currently, workers earn on average around €20,000 to €21,000 annually (\$24,800 to \$26,000) but the collective agreement would reduce this to €19,000. Amazon's CEO, Jeff Bezos, the world's richest person, has a personal fortune estimated at more than \$100 billion, while Amazon's market capitalization stands at almost \$700 billion.

The new agreement at San Fernando de Henares would mean:

- Lower wage increases, with wages falling below the inflation rate
- No more pay increases based on seniority

- A 25 percent reduction in sick pay
- A two-tier wage system, with new hires earning €3,000-5,000 less than current inventory workers
- Cuts to overtime for working "extraordinary hours," including holiday and night shifts

In Toledo, Amazon is set to open another logistical centre of about 100,000 square metres, equivalent to 12 soccer pitches. Amazon has another four warehouses throughout Spain, one in Madrid and three in Barcelona.

The recently opened warehouse in El Prat de Llobregat in Barcelona, covers an area of over 63,000 square meters, has the capacity to store 25 million products and employs 700 workers—set to rise to 1,500 over the next three years. It is to become the new hub for the whole of Southern Europe, a result of the regional Catalan government's participation in a global bidding war to lure Amazon. As former Catalan regional premier Carlos Puigdemont said last year, "We have a series of well-prepared territorial resources: the port of Barcelona, the airport, the sectors of economic activity in the Llobregat delta."

The attack on workers at San Fernando de Henares is part of a European-wide and global strategy by Amazon. The company offers cut-price goods delivered through sweatshop conditions, with its globally integrated half-a-million-strong workforce subjected to relentless speed-ups, total surveillance, back-breaking quotas, and minimal toilet and meal breaks.

These conditions cost the lives of three workers in the US at the end of last year.

Workers from San Fernando de Henares, or any other Amazon warehouse, cannot defeat transnational corporations like Amazon without a unified international fight. This was proven by the words of Fred Pattje, Amazon's General Manager of Operations

in Spain and Portugal, who made it clear the company was in advanced stages of efforts to break the strike by using its national and international logistical hubs.

At a press conference, Pattje said that Amazon would use its immense logistical network to break the strike. “We work with a network of 46 centers in Europe and, through it, we can meet the demand of all of Europe,” he said. In Madrid’s facility “we can easily receive 18,000 or 20,000 packages... There will be delays, but I do not think they will go beyond a few days.”

If Pattje can boast of the company’s strike-breaking preparations, this is due to the role of the unions who act as facilitators for the exploitation imposed by Amazon.

The unions have isolated the strike, refusing to extend it to other Amazon warehouses throughout Spain, like those in Getafe, El Prat de Llobregat and Martorelles, or to workers at the dozens of sub-contractors used by Amazon to transport goods. The call for a consumer boycott a week ahead of the strike aims only to cover for this imposed isolation.

Marc Blanes, leader of the CGT at the warehouse, told *eldiario.es* that the boycott call was born as “another measure of pressure on the company” since they consider that the effect of the strike may be minimized by the network of logistics centers in other parts of the continent. “Amazon has an almost strike-breaking logistic network, with 46 centers in Europe,” he added.

In fact, the main strike-breakers have been the unions. During 17 months of negotiations with the company since the collective agreement expired, they have not even tried to coordinate actions with Amazon strikes in Europe.

On November 24, Black Friday, traditionally the busiest shopping day of the year, Amazon workers at distribution centers in Germany, France and Italy held a strike. The CGT, CSIT, CCOO and UGT not only rejected joining the strike, but played the role of strike-breakers. In the words of Blanes to *eldiario.es*, during the Black Friday strike, “We had to cover the demand from France, where they had a conflict, [and] they asked us to do extra hours and so on.”

The CGT is also giving leeway to Amazon to use temporary workers during the strike. The CGT told *Business Insider* that the temporary staff—almost 900 of the 2,000 people who work in the warehouse—also have

the right to strike, but “we do not want to do the same level of pressure on them, some of them which may be about to renew their contracts.”

The despicable role being played by the anarcho-syndicalist CGT is another demonstration that workers need new organisations—rank-and-file workplace committees, independent of the unions, that they control democratically. The CGT, the third-largest union and promoted by various pseudo-left groups as a radical alternative to the social-democratic UGT and Stalinist CCOO unions, supports the same nationalist divisions as its counterparts. It plays a pernicious political role by sucking in workers disenchanted with the bigger union federations with radical and militant phraseology. When they are in dominant positions like they are in Amazon warehouses and in some sections of the auto industry and transport, they capitulate as quickly as their social democratic and Stalinist competitors.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections internationally have established the *International Amazon Workers Voice* as a platform of opposition, aimed at developing independent workplace committees that can link workers in each plant with their brothers and sisters in a worldwide fight against exploitation and for social equality. The newsletter exposes dictatorial working conditions, introducing workers to socialism, and providing regular news and analysis of world politics from the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Amazon workers are encouraged to write to the International Amazon Workers Voice to share their stories and expose injustice at their workplace. The newsletter will respect the anonymity of all workers and will take steps to ensure they are not subject to retribution. For regular updates, subscribe to the newsletter, like our Facebook page, and share them with your co-workers.



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