Washington Post staff sign open letter to Jeff Bezos asking for fair pay

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More than 400 workers at the *Washington Post* released an open letter Thursday beseeching the newspaper's owner and world's richest man, Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos (net worth $140 billion), to intervene on their behalf in protracted contract negotiations. Management has been intransigent in its demands for a series of concessions, refusing to negotiate on requests for better benefits, job security, and cost of living increases made by its staff.

The letter's signatories are primarily employed on the business and editorial side of the company, including sales, marketing, administrative personnel, and lower-level editorial staff. The Washington Post Newspaper Guild, representing 880 business and editorial staff and affiliated with the Writers Guild of America, has been engaged in negotiations that have dragged on for more than a year without any progress.

Workers at the *Washington Post*, which has long been considered one of the United States' political "papers of record," are demanding higher employer contributions to the 401(k) defined-contribution pension scheme, better pay, and stronger protections against layoffs and cutbacks.

"All we are asking for is fairness for each and every employee who contributed to this company's success: fair wages; fair benefits for retirement, family leave, and health care; and a fair amount of job security," the letter states.

These relatively minor requests have been met with unyielding hostility on the part of the paper's management, which has refused to move on any of these issues while at the same time demanding that its staff agree to a number of concessions undermining job security and legal recourse for victims of employer abuses. In effect, these changes would allow the *Post* to impose layoffs without having to provide severance compensation while denying laid off workers the right to bring legal action against the company regardless of circumstances.

The newspaper also initially sought to eliminate annual cost of living increases in favor of a system of "merit-based" pay raises for a few employees who are deemed to have performed best over the preceding year, a system that has long been used as a wedge to divide workers against one another by forcing them to compete for a small number of pay increases based on arbitrary criteria imposed unilaterally by management.

The *Post* recently agreed to an insulting $10 per week wage increase and a provision allowing review of compensation on the basis of alleged racial or gender discrimination. Since such discrimination is illegal under federal law, this imposes no additional obligations on management.

Even as his representatives in management refuse to hear their demands, the letter's signatories express extreme gratitude to Bezos for buying the newspaper and make impotent appeals to his supposed belief in democratic values: "We, the undersigned, have been extremely grateful that you stepped in to purchase the *Post* at a time when the traditional media model was collapsing, and we have given our all to take advantage of the long runway you promised… [The *Post*'s unwillingness to bargain] is unfair and even shocking from someone who believes democracy dies in darkness," referring to the paper's current slogan.

Bezos purchased the newspaper for $250 million in 2014. Since that time, the *Washington Post* has seen its long and well-established track record of promoting US imperialist interests accelerate to the point where it now serves more or less openly as a mouthpiece of the military-intelligence apparatus. The paper has published a string of slanderous and outright false

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stories about “fake news” and “Russian meddling” based on dubious, unnamed official sources in order to justify censorship and preparations for war against Russia and China.

In the last two months of 2016 alone, the paper published the “PropOrNot” article promoting an anonymous group that had compiled a blacklist of over 100 websites supposedly serving as “conscious or unconscious” purveyors of “Russian disinformation,” including a number of left-wing and antiwar websites, and a since-retracted article asserting that the Kremlin had hacked into Vermont’s electric power grid citing anonymous US government sources.

Bezos earned his fortune on the backs of Amazon’s army of super-exploited warehouse, factory, and delivery workers worldwide. Far from seeking to promote democracy, his purchase of the *Post* is intimately bound up with Amazon’s increasing integration into the military-intelligence apparatus.

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