

Amazon market capitalization surpasses \$1 trillion

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Amazon's market capitalization reached over \$1 trillion in value on Tuesday, making it the second company to do so in US history after Apple. Although Amazon's share value receded to \$2,039.51 by the end of Tuesday trading, Amazon's share value has soared by 108 percent over the past year alone.

The growth of massive corporate behemoths like Amazon is not the product of its supposed "creative ingenuity." Amazon's soaring profits, like those of Apple, are the direct result of the brutal exploitation of its workforce. Amazon and its owners stand atop a mountain of broken bones, hernias, torn knee and back muscles, heat strokes, stress-induced asthma attacks, and countless other lifelong bodily injuries.

The historic character of the rise of Amazon demonstrates once again that the inevitable outcome of capitalist development is monopolization. Amazon exemplifies how technological advances are subordinated to the profit motive under capitalism.

Amazon is a massive operation, international in nature, which now employs 566,000 people across many countries and 5 continents. It utilizes state-of-the-art technology and information systems to mobilize and integrate the worldwide distribution of millions of goods. But the immense profits produced on the backs of its workforce are not used to improve living conditions for the masses of working people; they enrich a narrow layer of the super-rich.

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos made \$1.8 billion on Tuesday alone. Broken down, this means Bezos made \$20,833 *per second*, an amount roughly equivalent to what an Amazon worker makes *in a year*. He made \$67 billion this year—equivalent to \$8 million an hour. Bezos is now the richest man on earth, with a net worth of \$164.7 billion. Based on the average US annual income of \$28,446, it would take an Amazon worker

over five million years to accumulate an amount equal to their CEO's wealth—about equal to the time since humans genetically split off from gorillas and chimpanzees.

The pay for many US workers is even lower. Base pay at Amazon is \$12 per hour, which amounts to less than \$25,000 per year.

Coverage by the *International Amazon Workers' Voice* (IAWV) newsletter has cited reports by workers at multiple facilities who have seen coworkers sleeping in their cars. Inside the facilities, workers face a high-tech dystopia, characterized by long hours and an authoritarian industrial regime. "It is like being tortured in your mind and your body for 10 hours a night," one worker, Shannon Allen, told the *World Socialist Web Site*. Another worker described the work as "modern day slavery."

A worker in the UK said that the company penalizes workers for getting hurt. "Someone hurt on the job? It gets raised to a leader who then calls first aid, they take a statement then ask if you are returning to work or going home. Going home incurs a half-point penalty."

All over the world, the company forces workers to labor at fast, tiring, and often dangerous speeds. The UK worker said: "I still have near misses and collisions from people rushing...now it's faster, faster, faster. It's all about being on the go, meeting rates and targets."

Amazon is ramping up the exploitation of its workforce as it prepares for another massive expansion. Last year, the company announced plans to open a second headquarters, though the decision as to where the facilities will be located has not yet been finalized. It also recently purchased 20,000 vans from Mercedes-Benz, with which the company plans to establish a network of contractors to carry out their last-mile delivery services. This development will deal a harsh

blow to the US Postal Service, which currently handles 40 percent of last-mile deliveries. It also has begun to muscle its way into the \$88 billion online ad market, with clear plans to surpass tech giants Google and Facebook.

Amazon workers have begun to fight back against their grueling working conditions and low pay. Strikes broke out at facilities in Spain, Germany, Poland, Italy and France this summer, and hundreds of workers have written in to the IAWV to describe the brutal exploitation they face at the hands of the company.

The ruling class has begun efforts to neutralize the growing opposition to social inequality, low wages, and sweatshop conditions. In particular, the Democratic Party is seeking to take control of these struggles and direct them back into safe channels like the Teamsters Union and the political orbit of Bernie Sanders, who endorsed Hillary Clinton for president after the 2016 Democratic primaries.

On Wednesday, Sanders introduced a bill that would tax corporations for the federal benefits their employees receive. The bill, named Stop Bad Employers by Zeroing Out Subsidies or “BEZOS Act,” would establish a 100% tax on companies equal to the public assistance programs their employees depend on to live.

This legislation does nothing to address the unsafe conditions workers face and will not raise wages or lead to an improvement in their lives. It is significant that the bill instead is intended to provide the government money which it will likely hand back over to the corporations in the form of tax cuts and deregulation. On top of this, the bill’s authors and sponsors know it has no chance of passage.

In contrast, the Socialist Equality Party demands the immediate seizure of all of Jeff Bezos’s assets and their immediate distribution to meet the needs of the working class, including by massive expenditures on public transportation, healthcare, education, and the provision of food, water and housing to those in need. The corporation must be transformed into a public utility to be run not for the private profit of a few but to meet human need.

To accomplish this historical task, Amazon workers require organization—not through the corrupt trade unions that take their dues money to pay the salaries of bureaucrats—but fighting organizations run by and for the workers themselves. Such organizations, workplace

committees, will be based on the principles of democracy and workers’ control of production, and will fight to educate the working class as a whole about the conditions Amazon workers face while inviting other sections of the working class to join in a common struggle against the massive corporations.



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