

After months of courtship, Amazon calls off New York HQ2 deal

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In yet another demonstration of Amazon's corporate power, the technology conglomerate valued at \$1.5 trillion has abruptly announced that the deal to locate its second headquarters (HQ2) in Long Island City, Queens is called off. The move comes after months of political grandstanding by elected officials and in anticipation of further bureaucratic hurdles.

Amazon reportedly paid no federal taxes last year even as local governments stumbled over each other to offer the company incentives to locate their sweatshop warehouses within their city limits.

"We were invited to come to New York," Amazon executive Brian Huseman said at the last City Council hearing in December 2018, "and we want to invest in a community that wants us."

The move underscores the tyrannical *modus operandi* of capitalism under current conditions of extreme economic and political crisis. Fearful of any popular opposition to its demands, it increasingly resorts to "my way or the highway" measures.

Both New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio bent over backwards to lure the company to New York City, ensuring that its bid was selected in November 2018 along with that of Arlington, Virginia from among 48 contestant cities. They worked behind the scenes for months to structure the deal so it would not require approval by the City Council, as well as by waiving zoning and other regulations to allow Amazon to develop a nearly 15-acre site on the East River across from midtown Manhattan.

But the promise of a nearly \$3 billion tax handout and other inducements to win one of the world's wealthiest corporations proved a harder sell than the New York Democratic Party had anticipated.

Amazon executives met privately with 35 of the 50

City Council members to placate the different factions of local government. City Council Speaker Cory Johnson refused to meet, insisting instead on the charade of a toothless public Council hearing at which Amazon executives sat impassively as they were grilled, allowing Johnson and others like Council member from Queens Jimmy Van Bramer to save face with their constituents.

To counter the negative optics of small but vocal protests organized by "progressive left" supporters of newly elected US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Amazon launched a public relations blitz on social media to open the new year. It also bombarded the large immigrant population of the neighborhood with glossy fliers proclaiming in multiple languages its intention to be a "good neighbor."

Additionally, the company agreed to set up training programs for a few hundred low-income residents of an adjacent public housing development, subsidize technology at public high schools in the area, and invest in transportation infrastructure.

But in recent weeks, a counter-offensive with reactionary overtones was launched in the media, labeling those protesting Amazon as "outsiders" to the community who were hypocrites for denouncing gentrification and rising rents. Public housing residents, organized by Bishop Mitchell G. Taylor, a community leader who grew up in the Queensbridge Houses, the large public housing development in Long Island City, also rallied in support of the deal last Monday.

"We're working to make sure that folks from our neighborhood could benefit from those jobs; there's going to be a lot of jobs," Taylor said at the rally. He cited a Siena College Research Institute poll showing that "56 percent of voters in the state back the project, while 36 percent disapprove." He added, "City

residents support the Amazon deal even more, with 58 percent approving.”

On Wednesday, Cuomo convened a meeting between the senior Amazon executive in charge of real estate, John Schoettler, and union officials, which “seemed to be making progress.”

Despite these last-ditch efforts by Cuomo and de Blasio, however, the prospect of any delay was deemed intolerable by Amazon, which demands total subservience from the local governments with which it works.

There is a growing oppositional mood in the working class to Amazon and to capitalism itself, as shown by the spread of protests and strikes in the US and internationally in the first two months of the year. The Socialist Equality Party advocates a socialist policy of expropriating Amazon and the corporate elite and addressing the needs of workers for decent employment, affordable housing, education and other public services.



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