

# Cuts to hours for Whole Foods workers exposes fraud of Amazon pay increase

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A report in the British *Guardian* newspaper on Wednesday revealed that workers at Whole Foods have seen their hours slashed after the Amazon-owned grocery chain raised its starting wages to \$15 per hour last year.

Amazon's CEO Jeff Bezos announced the pay raise across all of Amazon and Amazon-owned businesses last October as a cynical public relations ploy in response to mounting public outrage following revelations of brutal exploitation at the world's largest online retailer.

According to the *Guardian*, an Illinois-based Whole Foods worker told them that "once the \$15 minimum wage was enacted, part-time employee hours at their store were cut from an average of 30 to 21 hours a week, and full-time employees saw average hours reduced from 37.5 hours to 34.5 hours. The worker provided schedules from 1 November to the end of January 2019, showing hours for workers in their department significantly decreased as the department's percentage of the entire store labor budget stayed relatively the same." The reduction in working hours per-employee has not been made up for with new hires, forcing workers to accomplish the same tasks in less time.

The worker said that he or she had received an email explaining that the cut to hours was "the direct result of guidance from our regional team," i.e., from upper levels of management. That this is a company-wide policy was confirmed by accounts from workers from across the country. "This hours cut makes that raise pointless as people are losing more than they gained and we rely on working full shifts," one Maryland worker told the *Guardian*. Some workers have had to resort to taking paid time off in order to compensate temporarily for the loss in hours.

"Things that have made [the cut to hours] more noticeable are the long lines, the need to call for cashier and bagging assistance, and customers not being able to find help in certain departments because not enough are scheduled, and we are a big store," a California worker told the paper.

The cut in hours to Whole Foods workers lines up with the experience of workers at Amazon itself, who discovered that their modest pay increase was tied to the elimination of stock bonuses and other benefits. Shannon Allen, the well-known Amazon whistleblower whose story was first broken by the *World Socialist Web Site*, walked the WSWWS through the figures and showed how the elimination of the stock vesting and variable compensation programs meant she would lose thousands of dollars in total compensation under the new plan.

"It makes me so mad," Shannon said at the time. "I want to know who Bezos asked about doing this. Bezos said that he supposedly heard from his workers. Who did he ask? It wasn't me. We didn't get to vote. They didn't pass out a ballot. Nobody asked me. Now I have an option to buy my own stock. It just pisses me off."

Amazon's announcement of the \$15 per hour pay raise was hailed at the time by Bernie Sanders as a "shot heard round the world." The Democratic Party-aligned media followed suit, writing that this was "how democracy and capitalism are supposed to work," (*The New York Times*) and "inspiring" (the Bezos-owned *Washington Post*).

This has now been exposed as a sham. All of those praising Amazon knew from the start that the company would find ways get their pound of flesh back, as had been widely acknowledged by industry analysts.

Predictably, Senator Sanders, who last week announced his candidacy for the 2020 presidential

elections, has said nothing about the *Guardian* report. Sanders had spent months last year campaigning against Amazon's CEO Jeff Bezos as one of his "Faces of Greed" and proposed a bill in the Senate called the STOP BEZOS Act, which had no chance of passing, to tax low wage employers such as Amazon.

After Amazon announced its cosmetic pay increase, Sanders made a sudden about face, exchanging mutual praise with Jeff Bezos as though the two were longtime friends and admirers.

Sanders said nothing about the cuts to benefits and actively worked to shield Amazon from criticism as the details of the pay increase became clear. "Our understanding is that the vast majority of Amazon workers are going to see wage increases, including some very significant increases as the minimum wage goes up to \$15 an hour," Sanders told the Fox Business Channel last October in response to mounting criticism of Amazon.

Sanders still cites the bogus pay raise as one of his major accomplishments, and was introduced in a recent appearance in Chicago as "the man who stood up to Amazon and said you will pay \$15/hour."



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