

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos' message to warehouse workers: Keep working despite coronavirus threat

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Following a wave of workers' protests against the shipping and e-commerce giant Amazon, the corporation is doubling down on its demand that workers remain on the job without protection during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last week, Amazon workers in New York City walked off the job after the first known case of coronavirus was detected at a facility in Queens, forcing the company to temporarily shut down the site. In Italy and Spain as well, workers have shut down facilities rather than become sick.

In response, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos published a "message from our CEO and founder" on a company blog Saturday. Bezos' message, hidden behind his feigned paternalist concern for his workers, can be best summed up as "shut up and keep working!"

Bezos' letter begins with various claims about how "grateful" he is for the "vital service" shipping workers are performing. He notes workers' "efforts are being noticed at the highest levels of government," including President Trump, and that "[t]his isn't business as usual."

As a concession to workers protesting Amazon's efforts to make additional profits from the coronavirus by pressuring workers to ship unnecessary items, Bezos claims that the company will prioritize the shipping of "essential items like household staples, sanitizers, baby formula, and medical supplies."

Coming to the point, Bezos, the richest man in the world with a personal fortune of over \$120 billion, wrote, "Much of the essential work we do cannot be done from home. We've implemented a series of preventative health measures for employees and contractors at our sites around the world—everything

from increasing the frequency and intensity of cleaning to adjusting our practices in fulfillment centers to ensure the recommended social distancing guidelines."

These are lies. Numerous Amazon workers have written to the *International Amazon Workers Voice* to describe the company's "preventative health measures." A petition circulated by warehouse workers in New York City notes "despite larger workloads, Amazon continues to enforce and raise productivity quotas. At the same time, many workers have been shocked to discover the company has been illegally denying them paid sick leave."

In addition, workers are only granted paid time off if they are able to "prove" they have contracted coronavirus. Given the notorious rarity of obtainable testing, most workers will forgo this and be forced to remain at their posts.

Bezos then says, "We've placed purchase orders for millions of face masks we want to give to our employees and contractors who cannot work from home, but very few of those orders have been filled." Workers are chided to think of others and informed they must wait in line: "When our turn for masks comes, our first priority will be getting them in the hands of our employees and partners working to get essential products to people."

Despite his "we're all in this together" claim, it is certain that Bezos and the rest of the corporate and financial oligarchy are not "waiting in line" for anything. Not only will they be able to work from their mansions far away from infected factories and warehouses but in case they contract COVID-19, they will get the best "concierge health care" that money can buy. Nothing could contrast more with the

miserable health care Amazon workers get from the company doctors who send them back to the fulfillment lines as fast as possible.

Bezos' letter is a demonstration of the antisocial character of the entire capitalist class. If masks and other essential protective equipment are not available, Bezos declares to the working class that "the show must go on," so he and the rest of the corporate elite can continue to profit. Bezos' letter is a visceral confirmation of the conclusion made by the *World Socialist Web Site* about the capitalist class's motto in dealing with the pandemic: "If the accumulation of our billions requires the death of millions, so be it."

Workers reacted to the CEO's declaration that they were expendable with disgust. "It's amazing how many words one man can use to say 'go make me that money,'" a picker at GSP1 in Spartanburg, South Carolina, told the *International Amazon Workers Voice* (IAWV) when asked about the Bezos letter.

"The letter behind the letter is about how [he's] exploiting a crisis for financial gain. A genuine philanthropic gesture would be opening your multi-billion-dollar wallet and making sure shelters and soup kitchens were stocked," the Spartanburg worker said.

"Like I was saying to other coworkers, Jeff [Bezos] has enough money to give out testing to every Amazon building for COVID-19," another logistics worker in Baltimore wrote the IAWV to say.

"We workers are really important what we are doing now is very important because people really need these supplies. I've even seen some quarantine supplies go through to Amazon myself... But we have to understand that people are people and human beings are human beings and our health comes first," the worker said.

A former Amazon worker at the DFW-7 facility in Texas told the WSWS that Bezos' profusions of concern "means very little... to the millions of workers that have incurred bladder infections, fallen from multiple stories, [are] constantly monitored, [made] homeless... in your facilities' parking lots, and have dropped dead." He demanded that Bezos hand over his own wealth and "distribute it amongst the working people, resolve the water crises plaguing Flint, pay for your workers' rent, bills, and handover the means of production to the workers."

The WSWS and the IAWV call on workers to form independent rank-and-file committees to press their

demands for access to testing and fully paid health care and the closing down of all non-essential production. This must be combined with the fight to transform Amazon, UPS, FedEx and other giant logistic firms into public enterprises, collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working class. The company's technological capacity and global network must be utilized to deliver medical supplies, food and other basic necessities. At the same time workers engaged in this essential work must be supplied with state-of-the-art personal protection equipment and be constantly monitored by professional medical staff. The length of shifts and workloads must be reduced and workers must be paid living wages and provided with free, high quality health coverage.

We encourage workers to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* if they are in agreement with these demands.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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