Support the striking Instacart, Amazon and Whole Foods workers!

Jerry White
31 March 2020

The Socialist Equality Party calls on all workers to support the strikes and other actions by Instacart, Amazon and Whole Foods workers in the United States.

On Monday, Instacart workers initiated strike action because they are being forced to work without proper safety gear, including masks, gloves and hand sanitizer. As the coronavirus pandemic spreads, the unsafe conditions in which they work endangers not only their own lives, but the lives of the customers they serve.

These workers are performing a critical and heroic social service. The US is now an epicenter of the crisis, with 165,000 cases as of this writing and more than 3,100 deaths. With shelter-in-place orders covering nearly 250 million people in the US, the need for the delivery of food, medicine and other essential needs to people who cannot or should not leave their homes is more important than ever.

The 150,000 Instacart workers, known as "shoppers," pick up and deliver groceries from Kroger, Aldi, Sam's Club and other major food retailers. With growing demand for home deliveries, the San Francisco-based company plans to hire another 300,000 workers. But it has resisted demands to provide workers with the most elementary protections.

While Instacart CEO Apoorva Mehta, a 34-year-old former supply chain engineer for Amazon, sits on a private fortune of $400 million, Instacart workers earn an average of $7 a delivery. Like other gig economy workers, they are classified as "self-employed" contractors so that the company can avoid paying them the minimum wage, time off and unemployment benefits.

Workers want to do everything they can to combat the coronavirus pandemic. General Electric workers launched protests yesterday to demand that GE begin producing desperately needed ventilators. But workers do not want to endanger themselves and others so that the corporate oligarchs can accumulate their billions.

On the same day as the Instacart strike, Wall Street opened the week by celebrating the multitrillion-dollar "stimulus" handout to the banks and giant corporations. The Dow rose 690 points.

The Instacart strike is part of a broader movement of the working class. In recent days, Italian and Spanish auto and steel workers, British postal workers, French bus drivers and supermarket workers, and Brazilian call-center workers have struck to demand the closure of nonessential workplaces or protection for workers engaged in critical operations.

On Monday, workers at Amazon's fulfillment center in the New York City borough of Staten Island, where a worker tested positive last week, walked off the job to demand protective gear, the closure of the building until it is sanitized and full compensation for the 4,500 workers who work there.

Although workers in at least 10 of its warehouses have already tested positive, Amazon has refused to give workers paid time off and proper masks, gloves or other protective equipment.

In a letter to Amazon employees earlier this month, CEO Jeff Bezos said the company had ordered millions of masks to give to warehouse employees, drivers and contract workers but due to the global shortage "medical providers serving our communities need to be first in line. When our turn for masks comes, our priority will be getting them in the hands of employees."

The richest man in the world—who makes $6.5 billion each month, or a little under $150,000 every minute, and owns his own apparel, aeronautics, supermarket, software, newspaper, robotics and digital

© World Socialist Web Site

companies—claims he is incapable of organizing the production of masks for workers who are processing and delivering food and other essential goods.

Amazon yesterday announced that it had fired an employee who had helped to organize the action.

Supermarket workers at Whole Foods, also owned by Amazon, are planning a walkout today. The workers are demanding the shutdown of any store where a worker tests positive, full compensation for workers, the reinstatement of health care coverage for part-time and seasonal workers and increased employer payments to cover testing and treatment for all workers.

According to *Vice's Motherboard* site, workers at stores in New Orleans and Huntington Beach, California were informed by robocalls that fellow workers had tested positive and told to "press number one to confirm receipt." The stores remained open, however, because Whole Foods is racking up huge profits from customers rushing to stock up on food and other items.

Like the Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt, Bezos and the rest of the corporate and financial oligarchs want their slaves to go and build their pyramids no matter how many workers die in the process. But workers have another thing to say. This was summed up in an email to the *World Socialist Web Site* from an autoworker who denounced plans for a return to work on April 14—the expected peak of the virus—and insisted, "Our lives matter!"

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the immediate closure of all nonessential workplaces with full compensation to workers for any lost wages and benefits.

Economic life must be concentrated on the production and distribution of essential goods and services, including the provision of health care, testing and the manufacture of masks, gowns, ventilators and other medical equipment, the production and distribution of food and medical supplies and the maintenance of critical infrastructure, including the electrical, telecommunication, water and sanitation systems.

There are millions of workers, including grocery delivery workers, who are willing and able to provide this critical social service. But these workers must be guaranteed living wages and a safe working environment. All gig workers must be turned into full-time employees, with full benefits.

The SEP urges workers to form rank-and-file workplace committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves, to oversee working conditions and ensure the defense of workers' interests. No confidence can be placed in the trade unions, which are arms of corporate management that have done nothing to secure the safety of workers.

Rank-and-file committees, working with medical professionals at every workplace, must ensure the safety of all workers.

All the claims about the wonders of "private enterprise" are being exploded as Wall Street and the giant corporations come to the US government with hat in hand for trillions of dollars in public assets, which they expect the population to pay for.

The Socialist Equality Party insists that rather than being bailed out, the giant banks and corporations be turned into publicly owned utilities, democratically controlled by the working class, with no compensation to the billionaire shareholders and corporate executives.

There is no reason why the distribution of food and other essential items should be run by Instacart, Amazon and other private corporations. This vital social service should instead be part of a centrally planned socialist economy, based on addressing social needs, not generating private profit. All of society's material and human resources must be marshaled on a socially rational basis not only to fight this deadly disease, but to put an end to poverty, social inequality and class exploitation.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site