

Chicago Amazon workers demonstrate to demand protection from COVID-19

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Chicago Amazon workers marched outside Amazon's DCH1 delivery facility on Chicago's Southwest Side on Friday chanting, "Our lives matter!" The demonstration took place after management revealed that two DCH1 workers had tested positive for Covid-19. The demonstrations follow a walkout by 30 workers on Monday, who urged workers going into the facility not to clock in and risk their lives.

The DCH1 workers are expressing the growing anger by workers against corporations placing profit over their lives, which has fueled a wave of strikes in the auto industry, Instacart, Whole Foods and Amazon itself.

Workers at the DCH1 facility complete the last step of the Amazon order process, delivering packages to their final destination. While continuing to ship to millions of quarantined people across the United States, Amazon workers are not being provided with even minimal protective gear, such as face masks and gloves, heightening the risk of contracting and spreading the disease. The conditions in the plant, in which workers have to be in close contact with one another and working without basic protective equipment, provide grounds for the virus to spread rapidly.

Chicago DCH1 Amazon workers are demanding that their facility be shut down for two weeks and thoroughly cleaned, with workers receiving full pay, that Amazon pay for the full costs of medical treatment for workers and their family members, an end to processing all nonessential items, the suspension of the hated "rate" system which the company uses to enforce speedup, the immediate communication by management of all new cases in the facility as well as other demands.

According to DCH1 Amazonians United, the group that organized yesterday's strike, management quietly told workers on Friday, March 27, that a worker had tested positive for Covid-19. On their Facebook page, the group explained, "they only informed workers on that shift

about the coronavirus case AFTER we had already moved most of the volume for the night. Not only that, they only informed other workers by robocall later the next day after 3 more shifts of workers went into the warehouse."

This week, management admitted that another worker had tested positive.

Chicago is expected to become one of the next hot spots for Covid-19. Yesterday, local press reported that two Chicago area Wal-Mart workers have already died from the virus. As of this writing, 3,836 Chicagoans have tested positive and 8,904 across the state of Illinois. Given the lack of adequate testing, these figures greatly underestimate the real number of cases.

This is not the first time that workers at the DCH1 plant mobilized to oppose maltreatment by Amazon. In July 2019, some 30 Amazon workers at DCH1 confronted management demanding an increased pay of \$18 an hour, up from the average \$15, during all hours of Amazon's Prime Day—a day when Amazon implements massive speedups—and the days preceding it. Workers also demanded full health care and air conditioning in the DCH1 facility, which is blazing hot in the summertime.

The pandemic graphically exposes the brutal exploitation which Amazon inflicts on its workers in an effort to squeeze out as much profit as possible. Even before the pandemic, Amazon workers across the world confronted health and safety violations, speedups, increased quotas, harassment and injuries. The National Council for Occupational Safety and Health in 2018 placed Amazon on its "dirty dozen" list of employers known for unsafe workplaces.

In a letter to Amazon workers last month, the richest man in the world, multibillionaire Jeff Bezos, told Amazon workers they would have to "wait our turn" to receive protective masks in light of the nationwide shortage. There is no doubt Bezos has access to the best protective gear available and there is no doubt, given the

resources at his disposal—a logistics company, a distribution company, a software company and more—he could produce protective gear for Amazon workers. Yet, Amazon is determined not to waste its profits saving lives.

Striking Amazon workers are facing retribution from management, who are likely in direct contact with the upper echelons of Amazon’s corporate management, who are nervously monitoring the unfolding strikes.

Chris Smalls, the organizer of the Staten Island Amazon strike, was fired by Amazon based on the spurious claim that he violated quarantine restriction after coming into contact with a COVID-19 victim. The DCH1 Amazonians United group reported on their Facebook of harassment by management for striking, stating, “Amazon is subtly and overtly retaliating against us for speaking up and taking action.”

Striking retail, healthcare, transportation and other essential workers in the United States and across the world, should be supported by the working class in the United States and internationally. They must have safe workplaces, appropriate personal protective equipment, and guaranteed healthcare in the event they fall ill.

The official response by capitalist governments and major corporations to the pandemic, which combine criminal indifference to the deaths of millions with grotesque levels of incompetence, have contrasted sharply with the response of the working class, which has taken action all over the planet to demand a rational and organized response.

The Socialist Equality Party urges Amazon workers to develop this struggle by forming rank-and-file workplace committees, controlled democratically by workers themselves, to oversee working conditions and fight for the defense of workers’ interests. These committees must be developed in opposition to both the Democratic and Republican Parties, which have responded to the pandemic by handing trillions to the banks and major corporations.



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