

“Production costs do not equal the cost of a human life”

Outrage grows as Amazon workers die for Bezos’ profits

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Amazon workers across the United States are outraged at news that an Amazon employee working in Hawthorne, California died last month from COVID-19 and that workers only now are being informed of it.

The lives of Amazon, United Parcel Service, United States Postal Service, FedEx and other essential logistics workers are being sacrificed for corporate profit. Nothing demonstrates this more than the news that the personal fortune of Amazon CEO Jeffrey Bezos grew by \$24 billion during the first three months of 2020, primarily due to the rush of business the company saw as millions were forced to shelter in place as a pandemic swept the planet.

“This is not surprising, he is capitalizing off of this crisis, INSANE!!,” wrote an Amazon worker to the *International Amazon Workers Voice*. “To add to this, we are ‘essential’ and that means we are less like trash [to the company]. [Bezos] should be arrested along with his cronies for conspiracy to commit murder... CRIMINAL!!”

The news of Bezos profiting while workers die exposes the lie in his open letter last month when the multi-billionaire boss told his poorly paid workers, “We are in this together.”

“I heard about [the death] but didn’t realize that this had happened so many weeks ago,” said an Amazon worker in Baltimore’s BWI-2 facility. “This corporation benefits its stockholders. It’s not designed for safety. It’s all about product, product, product! Numbers, numbers, numbers!”

“The company is adding a third and fourth tier [to its employee pay scale],” the worker added, saying this was a “carrot” to entice workers to believe “it’s not so bad, I’m sweating blood, sweat and tears but it’s

alright.”

“Production costs and operation costs do not equal the cost of a human life,” the worker concluded.

The company informed its BWI-2 employees on Wednesday of a COVID-19 case at the facility. Speaking of previous incidents, the worker said, “About two weeks ago, I came in to work and there was a news crew reporting on site about a suspected case at the facility. Management told us it was a mistake.” A few days later, however, the company admitted that a case had occurred and that workers would be fired for speaking to the press about it.

The company was fearful of more rank-and-file opposition forming at its facilities, because “at this point, the protests on Staten Island were going on,” the worker noted. In New York, these protests against unsafe job conditions resulted in the victimization of Chris Smalls, who led a walkout.

Last month, the Amazon CEO was the object of a public backlash after news coverage revealed that the company had set up a coronavirus relief fund for its employees. Bezos, whose personal wealth now stands at \$138 billion, donated \$25 million while asking the public to donate the rest to meet the health care needs of the company’s nearly 800,000 employees.

“How is your company worth over a TRILLION dollars and you want the public to donate to an employee relief fund?! As if Amazon can’t pay their employees themselves,” wrote one poster on Twitter in response to Amazon’s request that the public “make a voluntary donation to the fund.”

Another worker at the CLT4 facility in South Carolina told the *International Amazon Workers Voice* that three workers tested positive there. Despite that,

the worker said, the distribution plant was staying open. Summing up the position of the company, the worker told the IAWV that management said, “We know we have folks that have tested positive [for the coronavirus] here, but we have asked them and those they worked closely with to stay home. The temperature checks and masks we hand out upon entrance to the facility ensure we’re doing everything to keep our workers safe during this time.”

Another worker, speaking on the condition of anonymity, explained the miserable state of safety protocols at his facility. “At my location, they have temperature checks, they’ve ended the staff meetings and now they allow cell phones” so workers can check up on their family members and respond to emergencies. “But hand sanitizer, which is difficult to find in large buildings, is just for show. The self-serve dispensers they set up ran out in one day and haven’t been refilled since.”

As for hand washing, “in my building, which has four floors, you have a full-service bathroom on only two of them, while the other two floors have portable hand washing stations set up in different corners.” All of this might sound very convenient and efficient, she said, but there is a catch, “The portable stations have soap and hand towels, but no water.”

“I’ve seen people using their own bottled water to rinse themselves off,” she continued. “Some people bring their soapy hands over to the [drinking] water area and wash their hands there, with the soap and germs splashing the area” where workers fill up their drinking cups.

In addition to the hand rinsing going on at drinking fountains, the worker said there was no such thing as social distancing at the two-person portable sinks. “Amazon tells us they’ll fire us if we break social distancing. They break it all the time. We’ve lost some soldiers due to this.”

Last week, CNBC reported that Amazon was informing its employees that if they broke “social distancing rules, they could face disciplinary action,” including termination.

A worker said, “I spoke to Human Resources today and there are no protocols in place for the ‘social distancing patrols’” Amazon now uses to keep workers from congregating too close. “They’re picking and choosing who to write up [so they can] kick out people

that rock the boat. They’re now working with their legal department to get something on paper,” because the company is firing people due to infractions, the worker said.

Another worker from Baltimore told the IAWV that workers see management “breaking social distancing all the time. The only time it is really enforced is when you are walking through the main area” of the building lobby. “In back, it’s not being enforced,” the worker said.

“We have a system where workers are being relied on to push out goods to the American people, yet these same workers are risking their lives to do this work with minimal hazard pay, minimum [personal protective gear], etc.” another worker from New Jersey told the IAWV. “Most of [us] have little choice to go in or not because Amazon will not pay for time off unless you are sick with the virus. If that happens you will not have enough money to deal with the costs that come with this virus.”

“This while Bezos, who continues to be praised for donating an extremely small percentage of his wealth to charities helping with this pandemic, is making record profits, along with his shareholders. Systemic change is required to change the system to benefit workers and not punish them,” the worker concluded.



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