

# Amazon workers continue job actions and protests, as tech employees plan Friday sickout

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23 April 2020

The wave of job actions by Amazon workers protesting the lack of protection from the coronavirus pandemic is continuing, with hundreds of hourly workers at dozens of facilities around the US staying home from work this week. Their courageous actions, defying the company's intimidation campaign, are winning the support of wider layers of the working class, with tech and white-collar workers at Amazon planning to hold a sickout and an online discussion with warehouse workers Friday.

According to John Hopkins University, 46,583 people have died of COVID-19 in the US, with growing numbers of public health researchers reporting that this is only a portion of the real toll. These deaths include dozens of nurses and grocery store employees, over 25 autoworkers, and an Amazon worker in California. As of early April, there were already coronavirus cases at over 50 of Amazon's facilities.

Laboring in the midst of the pandemic, workers are risking their lives and those of their loved ones. The dangers faced by Amazon workers—as with many nurses, meat and food processing workers, grocery store workers, and others categorized as essential—include the widespread lack of adequate personal protective equipment (PPE); the absence of mass testing, so that an asymptomatic worker can easily and unknowingly spread the virus throughout huge facilities; and most nefarious, the company's deliberate concealment of positive cases from workers.

Under these pressures, workers are courageously stepping up and entering into struggle.

The job action by Amazon workers this week is the latest development in a chain reaction of Amazon strikes around the world. The following strikes happened in rapid succession: the shutdown of the DBK1 facility in Queens, New York City. A 50-worker walkout at the JFK-8 facility in Staten Island. The same day, a 300-strong strike in central Italy. Two following strikes in the Midwest United States, involving 70 workers. Another 50-worker strike at JFK-8. This week, over 300 workers calling out at facilities across

the US.

Many workers leading strikes, and in one case, a worker planning to strike, have been fired from their jobs. Six workers in the US have been terminated.

1. Bashir Mohamed: Somali immigrant, who distributed paper pamphlets in Somali and English, trying to organize in Minnesota. His firing was reported Wednesday.
2. Jordan Flowers: Robotics technician for JFK-8, fired April 21.
3. Gerald Bryson: Amazon warehouse employee for JFK-8, fired last week.
4. Emily Cunningham: User experience (UX) designer and leader of the Amazon Employees for Climate Justice group. Fired last week after tweeting that Amazon warehouse employees faced hazardous conditions.
5. Marle Costa: UX designer and also a leader of Amazon Employees for Climate Justice, fired alongside Emily Cunningham.
6. Chris Smalls: Organizer of JFK-8 walkout and assistant manager, fired March 30.

Amazon has fired the warehouse workers for supposedly breaking social distancing policies, a curious charge given that it is almost impossible not to break it due to cramped working conditions. It has fired the UX developers for breaking “internal policies.”

The firings are a blatant attempt by Amazon, one of the wealthiest and most powerful companies on the planet, to intimidate workers seeking to assert their interests. Far from having the desired effect, the retaliatory measures are fueling growing outrage.

A worker at Baltimore's BWI2 facility told the *World*

*Socialist Web Site* that she thought strike action was necessary. “A lot of people will participate. We feel disrespected by Amazon. I spent a lot of time trying to find personal protective gear [PPE] online, only to learn that Amazon was selling the same masks I was looking for here. They never even bothered to offer it to us.”

Another worker at the facility declared, “My hat’s off to the striking Amazonians bold enough to take a stand. I hope to walk a mile in your shoes very soon.”

COVID-19 is expected to create an enormous increase in profitability for Amazon, with the British *Guardian* shamelessly headlining one recent article, “\$10,000 a second? Amazon’s results could be amazing.” Unsurprisingly, the company is already facing a lawsuit for price gouging. A surge of demand in online shopping following quarantine led Amazon to hire over 100,000 workers in a month, with plans to hire an additional 75,000 in May.

While the vast majority of stocks are facing sharp declines, the value of Amazon stock is at near all-time highs, greatly contributing to CEO Jeff Bezos wealth increase of \$24 billion since the beginning of the year.

After purchasing a \$165 million mansion in February, Bezos bought a fourth condo in New York City for \$16 million, in the same building. Meanwhile, he has donated an insulting \$100 million to food banks—less than a fraction of a percent of his obscene fortune.

With a market capitalization of over \$1.1 *trillion* and stock price currently over 2,300, the company and its main shareholders are sitting atop astronomical sums of money. In 2019, Amazon had a record net profit of \$11.59 billion and a cash pile of \$21.65 billion. The company has acquired numerous multi-million and multi-billion dollar corporations, creating an empire that is expected to have over 1 million employees by the end of 2020.

The basis for these massive figures is the exploitation of hundreds of thousands of workers globally for profit.

Most recently in France, after courts ruled in favor of the trade union SUD and its demands for better protections for workers, Amazon is threatening to fire all of its over 10,000 French workers, shut down facilities and move elsewhere.

To carry out a serious fight against one of the largest transnational corporations on the planet, workers urgently require new organizations, rank-and-file workplace committees independent of the trade unions, and an international perspective and strategy.

The Amazon strike taking place in the US this week was organized by United for Respect, which is backed by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) union and aligned with the Democratic Party. UFCW is attempting to “organize” Walmart and other non-union

grocery store workers not in order to lead a struggle for workers’ rights, but rather to shore up its dues base, and, above all, to attempt to prevent a growing movement of workers from developing into a direct confrontation with the capitalist system and its political representatives.

According to OpenSecrets.com, the UFCW spends virtually all of its campaign funds, based on workers’ dues, to support the Democratic Party, which included support for the election of Barack Obama in 2012, Hillary Clinton in 2016, and now Joe Biden in 2020. All three of these figures have played major roles in leading the country towards more wars, an extreme transfer of wealth from the working class to the wealthy and the decimation of healthcare—paving the way for the deaths of tens of thousands from COVID-19.

The UFCW also represents thousands of meatpacking workers, and despite a spate of deaths and some of the largest clusters of infections, it has not called for a strike, let alone for joint action by its million-plus membership. These are workers who enjoy the overwhelming support of the majority of the population.

In order to fight against an enemy as ruthless as Amazon, workers must understand that they need unity, across all sectors, industries and national borders. They face not just one particularly ruthless and powerful company, but the entire capitalist system, which is demonstrating on a daily basis that it is incapable of securing even the most basic needs of the population.

The situation is urgent: Workers must hold meetings online to form rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by the ranks and led by the most trustworthy and intransigent workers. To win the fight against Amazon, an international and socialist strategy is essential. The International Amazon Workers Voice will provide every assistance possible to workers in carrying out these tasks. We encourage Amazon workers who want to join this fight to contact us today.



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