

Amazon eliminates pay raises for workers as COVID-19 toll mounts

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Amazon has announced that the company will be eliminating its pay increases for workers in the US at the end of the month, notwithstanding the mounting number of COVID-19 infections and deaths of Amazon workers. This follows Amazon's announcement earlier this month that it will terminate its policy of allowing workers to take unlimited unpaid time off during the coronavirus pandemic.

With the elimination of these measures, Amazon is joining the worldwide chorus of political elites, billionaire oligarchs and financial speculators demanding that workers return to work before it is safe to do so, in order to safeguard the "economy," by which they mean profits for the super-rich.

In March, confronted with mass abstention and the threat of walkouts, Amazon grudgingly instituted a meager \$2 dollar per hour pay raise, along with double overtime pay, in order to try to coax workers back into its warehouses during widespread lockdowns and closures.

Amazon also adopted a policy of unlimited unpaid time off (UPT time), effectively furloughing those workers who were unwilling or unable to work during the pandemic, replacing them in a mass hiring of an additional 100,000 US warehouse and delivery workers amid increased demand from online sales and mass unemployment as retail stores closed down from the virus.

A company spokesperson told the press, "We are grateful to associates supporting customers during a time of increased demand and are returning to our regular pay and overtime wages at the end of the month."

In an interview on *60 Minutes*, David Clark, head of Amazon Operations, said, "Do we feel like we are putting people in unnecessary risk? No."

Amazon is a trillion-dollar international conglomerate that employs more than 840,000 workers around the world. It is run by the world's richest man, billionaire oligarch Jeff Bezos. His message to workers is the same as the message from President Donald Trump, the auto companies, and the capitalist class around the world: "Back to work!"

The elimination of the policy of unlimited UPT time means that workers who refuse to work under unsafe conditions will be fired, to be replaced with someone else. If workers get sick and die, then this is acceptable "collateral damage" in the reckless drive to boost profits.

According to Facebook posts, Amazon worker Eric Miller at the SDF8 warehouse in Jefferson, Indiana recently died from COVID-19. On Thursday, it was reported by the *Verge* that another worker died in Indianapolis, Indiana, bringing the total known Amazon deaths to seven.

Amazon itself does not report on the number of workers who have been infected or who have died, claiming that this data is not "particularly useful." The discovery of a case that was concealed or inadequately addressed by management has frequently been the trigger for angry demonstrations and walkouts by workers. The company's current policy is to send out generic text messages to its employees when an infection is confirmed, but workers report that these are often delayed, inaccurate and sent to the wrong warehouses.

According to Jana Jumpp, an Amazon worker in Indiana who has been compiling a list of confirmed infections, the number of Amazon warehouse workers infected has reached 800. At three-fourths of Amazon warehouses in the US, there has been at least one case.

The true number of cases is likely far higher, due to

the lack of adequate testing. The United States currently leads the world in number of confirmed cases, which is now over 1.5 million, and deaths, around 90,000.

Bezos's personal wealth has skyrocketed during the pandemic, reaching \$145 billion and counting. He has increased his net worth \$35 million every single day over the last three months. With tens of millions unemployed during the pandemic, media reports this week indicated that Bezos is set to become the first trillionaire in history by 2026.

Under conditions of mounting anger among Amazon workers, the unions, the Democratic Party, and their affiliates have stepped up their drive to capture Amazon workers' opposition in the US by "unionizing" them, i.e., bringing them under the control of the trade unions.

The unions, for their part, are just as complicit in the deadly conditions facing workers as the Trump administration, the Democrats and the billionaires like Bezos. The Teamsters union, which covers many UPS employees, has kept workers on the job throughout the pandemic without adequate safety equipment despite the mounting numbers of infections and deaths. Meanwhile, Teamsters President James P. Hoffa has been chosen by President Trump to sit on the government board with Bezos and other corporate executives to re-open the economy.

In a recent article published by representatives of Amazonians United in the *Labor Notes* publication—which is closely aligned with Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), a faction of the Democratic Party, and the corrupt United Auto Workers bureaucracy—the authors praise the actions of Amazon VP Tim Bray, who resigned "in solidarity" with the May 1 publicity stunt that the pseudo-left unsuccessfully attempted to organize at Amazon.

A New Jersey Amazon worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "Unfortunately, right now the 'false victories' are being interpreted as actual victories. I was happy to hear about the VP resigning, but come on, this does not change a thing. We still have workers dying now. Amazon refused to disclose how many people are sick and dead from COVID-19, while Bezos is on the path to becoming a trillionaire. It's a failed state." The unions, he agreed, were "part of the problem."

Every day in the workplace, Amazon workers

confront cosmetic and inadequate "safety" measures that expose workers and their families to the risk of illness and death. Workers also report that management is using the arbitrary application of "social distancing" guidelines to target and harass workers who speak out against the deadly conditions.

As an urgent question of self-defense for themselves and their families, workers must form rank-and-file workplace committees to discuss and advance the measures necessary to safeguard workers' lives and health, including a pace of work that prioritizes safety, adequate protective equipment and supplies, paid sick leave, systematic testing, and oversight by medical experts committed to workers' safety.



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