

Amazon workers discuss the issues raised by the US presidential election

Our reporters

2 November 2020

On the eve of a US presidential election taking place in an atmosphere of unprecedented crisis and dominated by two right-wing billionaire-backed candidates—Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden—the *International Amazon Workers Voice* spoke to Amazon workers about the issues being raised in the contest.

Referring to the choice between Biden and Trump, Alvin—a worker in Baltimore—said “It’s like picking the worse of two evils,” adding that “once [Vermont Senator Bernie] Sanders dropped out, we’re now left with two devils.”

Sanders, who postured as a socialist, has now thrown his full support behind the Biden campaign, absurdly claiming that this right-wing shill of Corporate America can be pressured to carry out a progressive agenda.

“What’s the point of risking getting COVID-19 to vote for that?” he exclaimed rhetorically, noting that the city of Baltimore had seen drastic increases in COVID-19 cases recently. “You think the protests after George Floyd’s [death] were wild? Wait until November 4,” he offered.

With US COVID-19 cases now numbering over 9 million and over 230,000 deaths, combined with an economic collapse with millions facing the risk of eviction in the cold winter months, the United States alongside the rest of the capitalist world is a social powder keg on the verge of explosion.

“I’m tired of this administration,” stated Mark, another Baltimore Amazon worker. “*Of course* Donald Trump is telling us that COVID-19 is ‘disappearing.’ All of these deaths are on his watch...I’m not very sold on who’s representing the Democratic Party, either. I don’t trust either one of them. One talks. The other responds. Some of the lies are easy to spot. Some of them are harder.”

Mark connected the political crisis to the conditions at his job. “Look at my boss,” he said, speaking of Amazon’s multibillionaire owner Jeff Bezos, “I’m in an environment where there are so many COVID-19 cases. It’s been damn near a year and now they’ve finally given us self-tests” at Amazon.

“I work 11-hour days. I’m tired of wearing a mask all day. This thing causes breathing problems. It wears on you after a while.

“Amazon is the type of company that, if you’ve worked inside of it, you also can understand how the world works.” Explaining this point, he said: “We have no real democracy. In Amazon, the alternative is ‘you can leave if you don’t like it.’ That’s how this country is being run...You’ll find people of every nationality. There is no discrimination in Amazon. We are all exploited.”

Mark spoke powerfully on the contrast between genuine democracy and what exists in American society. “I’ve worked for a whole lot of companies,” he said, “and I’ve never heard any manager in any boardroom ever say anything about what ‘the people’ want. Amazon promises you so much, but in the end, they take your dignity...If workers can’t have any say there is no way for you to have a respectful workforce. Amazon is the only company I’ve ever worked for that all of its reviews were bad. And every review was also true.”

Mark’s comments point to the stark reality the working class faces. The choices offered to workers around the world by the capitalist class, in their so-called “democratic” elections, is a choice between different sections of the billionaires and millionaires. In the 2020 US presidential election, *Forbes* estimates that the Republican Donald Trump has about 101 billionaire backers, with the Democrat Joe Biden having 134. Amazon general counsel David Zapolsky held a fundraiser last year on behalf of Biden, with tickets ranging between \$1,000 and \$2,800 per person.

During the pandemic—while millions of workers lost their livelihoods—a study by the Institute for Policy Studies and Americans for Tax Fairness found that US billionaires increased their wealth by almost \$1 trillion from March to October 2020. This amounts to roughly \$2,850 for every individual in the United States (total population 328.2 million).

Inequality has grown steadily over the past several decades under both Democratic and Republican administrations.

According to a 2018 report by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, 65 percent of federal tax cuts have gone to the top 20 percent of wealth holders since the year 2000. According to the Department of Defense, at roughly the same time, from 2000-2019, US taxpayers funded over \$13.34 trillion dollars in military spending. The capitalist class has utilized the Democrats and Republicans to carry out its interests, imposing destitution for the vast majority while accelerating the drive to war.

Joey, a warehouse worker in New Jersey, was raised in a family with a military background. He said “I’ve seen and heard my family members cry when talking about their experiences in the Middle East. Many of them suffer from PTSD. The rest of the world views the US military as the ‘bad guy.’”

“The rich soldier, with elite family connections, he’s never the guy out in front. It’s the poor and those from working class backgrounds that get sent to the front lines to die. We’re like chess pieces to them.”

In the course of the conversation with Joey, he had expressed certain illusions in Trump, viewing him as having scaled down US militarism. However, the Trump administration, like the administrations of Obama, Bush, and Clinton, despite tactical differences, has ramped up the drive to war. In addition to funding a record war budget, under the Trump presidency US imperialism is stoking tensions throughout the world.

In Latin America, the US is staging war games targeting Venezuela. In Europe, the US and its allies have staged rehearsals for the nuclear bombing of Russia. In Asia, the US is backing India in its potentially explosive border conflict with China and has also developed its “QUAD” alliance with India, Australia, and Japan to prepare for war against China.

Both Biden and Trump have postured as being “tough” on China, advancing policies, which if not stopped, will lead to world war. Within the ruling class, there is no anti-war faction.

Like Mark and Alvin, Joey expressed disdain for the lack of actual choices in the election. “I was looking at the ballot and there were other names besides Trump and Biden. Why have I never heard of these candidates before? We don’t really get a choice between the Democrats and Republicans.”

Echoing Alvin’s remarks Joey continued, “I think that with all that’s going on there’s going to be something big happening soon. Things can’t continue on like this. History repeats itself and in the past, like in the Great Depression, a lot of people began to think differently and acted in mass. Regardless of what happens, I know that things are going to change.”

Mark, Alvin, and Joey’s comments are not unique but are representative of a shift in consciousness taking place among workers around the world. There is growing recognition that “democracy” is merely an illusion within a society dominated by massive levels of economic inequality, that a break with the two-party system is necessary, and that it will take organized mass action for any significant change to occur.

The *International Amazon Workers Voice* is leading the effort to unite Amazon workers around the world, by helping them form their own organizations, rank-and-file committees that are democratically controlled by workers themselves. We fight to unite Amazon workers with all other sections of the working class. This requires a break with all capitalist parties and the building of a genuine working class political party.

In the course of the election, the Socialist Equality Party has fought to lay bare the reality of the US political system, exposing the growth of right-wing terror networks backed by the highest levels of the state and aimed at preparing an election coup on behalf of Trump. The Democrats have downplayed this threat, urging the population to remain calm. Both Democrats and Republicans are pushing for reopening the economy while the pandemic accelerates. Both have spearheaded policies that have resulted in mass death and a massive transfer of wealth to wealthy layers.

For its part, the Socialist Equality Party has called for the transformation of corporations into public utilities, with production based on social need, not private profit. In the 2020 elections, the Socialist Equality Party and its candidates Joseph Kishore for president and Norissa Santa Cruz for vice president are the genuine representatives of the working class, who show the way forward in opposition to the political parties of Wall Street and death.

We strongly encourage workers who want to learn more to reach out to the Socialist Equality Party and *International Amazon Workers Voice*.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)