

Leaked documents from Amazon's Global Security Operations Center expose worldwide conspiracy to suppress workers' resistance

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On Monday, *Motherboard*, a project of Vice News, published the contents of dozens of documents leaked from Amazon's Global Security Operations Center (GSOC), a secretive division of the company dedicated to spying on the approximately one million Amazon workers worldwide and suppressing resistance to the company's exploitative practices.

According to *Motherboard*, the leaked documents, which date from 2019, show that the GSOC surveillance apparatus tracks in detail "the exact date, time, location, the source [and] the number of participants" in any acts of opposition by Amazon workers, including everything from "strikes" to "the distribution of leaflets."

GSOC operatives also track political and organizational discussions online, emerging leaders among workers, workplace grievances, union organizing efforts, and the activities of workers on social media and on company listservs.

In particular, according to *Motherboard*, Amazon intelligence operatives have been tracking with great sensitivity the larger social movements emerging around the world, including everything from the "yellow vest" protests in France to environmental activist Greta Thunberg's climate strikes.

One such report on the "yellow vest" protests reads, in part: "Protests in Paris are planned, both by striking union members and [Yellow Vests], on 7 December. A march is planned by Yellow Vest activists [sic] from Bercy at 1130 CET to porte de Versailles via Austerlitz, Denfert, Place de la Catalogne and porte de Vanves. It is unclear whether striking unions will participate in the same march organized by [Yellow Vests] but it is expected of them to join starting at Montparnasse."

Amazon's GSOC operatives are clearly concerned that social movements emerging around the world could quickly draw in significant numbers of Amazon workers, disrupting the company's global operations and profits.

Also exposed by the leaked documents are links between Amazon and the infamous Pinkerton detective agency. In November 2019, according to the leaked documents, Amazon "inserted" Pinkerton spies into a warehouse in Wroclaw, Poland, purportedly to investigate whether management was engaged in wrongful hiring practices.

The leaked report states that "PINKERTON operatives were inserted into WRO1 ADECCO between 2019-11-19 and 2019-11-21," but that the investigation had not reached a conclusive determination. "WRO1" is Amazon's designation for the Wroclaw warehouse and Adecco is the Amazon contractor operating the facility.

The information that has been revealed so far about the company's

relationship with Pinkerton is limited, but the exposure of Pinkerton spies being "inserted" into a warehouse to provide intelligence to GSOC in itself raises numerous questions.

How many Pinkerton spies have been "inserted" into Amazon warehouses globally? How many other warehouses have had corporate spies in them? Have Pinkerton spies or GSOC informants attended political meetings of Amazon workers outside the workplace?

Besides Pinkerton operatives, how many other spies have been "inserted" into Amazon warehouses? Have these spies violated workers' legal and democratic rights in the countries where they have been "inserted," including the right to privacy, the right to freedom of association, the right to organize, and the right to free speech?

Amazon, an international conglomerate valued at \$1.5 trillion, is headed by the world's richest person, Jeff Bezos, whose personal fortune is estimated at around \$200 billion. While the company's earnings and market capitalization have soared during the coronavirus pandemic, management's failure to ensure safe working conditions has triggered walkouts and protests among Amazon workers around the world. By October, around 20,000 Amazon workers in the US had been confirmed to have been infected with the virus.

The Pinkerton detective agency has a villainous history of surveillance, infiltration, violence, and other anti-democratic schemes directed against the workers' movement in the US stretching back more than a century and a half. It was the Pinkertons who helped bring phrases like "labor spies" and "gun thugs" into the national vocabulary.

Pinkerton spies played an infamous role in the suppression of "The Long Strike" of 1875, which witnessed some of the bloodiest and bitterest episodes in all of labor history. In the aftermath of the strike, twenty Irish immigrants, dubbed the "Molly Maguires," were martyred after drumhead trials between 1876 and 1879, including ten hanged in one day on June 21, 1877, known as the "Day of the Rope."

Particularly during the Coal Wars (1890–1930) and the nationwide struggle for the eight-hour day, squads of thugs from companies like Pinkerton could be found anywhere that management was trying to suppress workers' resistance.

Pinkerton agents were called in during the Colorado Coalfield War in 1914, during which National Guard soldiers machine-gunned striking workers and their families in the Ludlow Massacre. Around 300 Pinkertons were brought into Chicago to escort scabs through picket lines the day before the Haymarket Square massacre on May 4, 1886. And a small army of Pinkerton thugs were dispatched to

suppress the 1892 Homestead steel strike, where they opened fire on a crowd of workers and their families in a massacre that made the name “Pinkerton” notorious internationally.

Private intelligence agencies like Pinkerton, which played a major role in the suppression of workers’ struggles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, were largely displaced in the US by the development of the Federal Bureau of Investigation as well as by the expansion of city and county police departments by the mid-20th century. However, the Pinkerton agency still survives to this day as a division of the Swedish security company Securitas AB, where the Pinkertons are billed as providers of “intelligence” and “protection” services.

In a more recent example, Pinkerton agents escorted right-wing extremist and “Campus Watch” founder Daniel Pipes to a provocation at York University in Toronto in 2003. And in 2018, striking Frontier Communications workers in West Virginia and Virginia reported to the *World Socialist Web Site* that agents from Pinkerton and Securitas USA had been hired to monitor and intimidate the strikers.

In a statement responding to the leaked documents, Amazon management acknowledged that it had hired Pinkerton agents but claimed that they were only providing security for high-value shipments.

“We have business partnerships with specialist companies for many different reasons—in the case of Pinkerton, to secure high-value shipments in transit,” the company’s representative stated. However, this statement is directly contradicted by the text of the leaked documents, which show Amazon “inserting” Pinkerton agents into a warehouse in Poland as part of an investigation that had nothing to do with “securing high-value shipments in transit.”

Amazon’s official statement also included this remarkable sentence: “We do not use our partners to gather intelligence on warehouse workers.” Far from providing any sort of reassurance to Amazon warehouse workers, this carefully-worded statement, even if it is to be believed, implies only that “partners” like the Pinkertons do not directly gather intelligence on warehouse workers. In other words, Amazon’s GSOC takes care of that sort of dirty work in-house.

Indeed, in September, Vice News exposed an intricate spying operation by Amazon against its Flex Drivers, with company operatives infiltrating private Facebook Groups to snitch on efforts to organize opposition. Later in September, a whistleblower revealed that management operatives have been monitoring opposition on listservs at the “amazon.com” domain.

These exposures came alongside revelations of the company’s efforts to hire ex-military, ex-police, and ex-intelligence agents for the positions of “Intelligence Analyst” and “Senior Intelligence Analyst” at GSOC. These veterans from the repressive apparatus of the state and with experience in imperialist wars abroad are being tasked with monitoring “threats” to company profits from industrial actions by workers.

In an article published on September 28 documenting Amazon’s campaign of surveillance and repression against its own workforce, the *World Socialist Web Site* compared the activities of Amazon’s GSOC to the role of the Pinkertons a century ago.

This comparison turned out to be accurate in more ways than one: not only does Amazon’s 21st-century apparatus of surveillance and repression resemble a high-tech version of the Pinkertons—it turns out that Amazon has hired the *actual* Pinkertons.

It is important for workers to be on guard against the ruthless efforts by GSOC and its security “partners” to monitor and block any effort to organize resistance. Amazon workers are encouraged to spread

awareness of these practices among fellow workers and to contact the *International Amazon Workers’ Voice* to report any additional evidence of such efforts by management.

However, this opposition to Amazon’s repressive apparatus does not imply any support for the ongoing efforts of various trade unions and their affiliates to win union recognition at Amazon warehouses. These unions have spent decades cooperating with management to betray their existing memberships, and if successful in winning legal representation at Amazon, they will play the same role in muzzling and suppressing the voices of Amazon workers.

Amazon workers should join with fellow workers in other industries who have rejected the efforts of unions to impose their corrupt bureaucracies on workers’ struggles, as in the case of auto workers at the Faurecia Interior Systems facility in Spring Hill, Tennessee, who rejected UAW representation in March, as well as the auto workers at the Volkswagen assembly plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee who have twice rebuffed the UAW.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the *International Amazon Workers’ Voice* are assisting Amazon workers with the establishment of rank-and-file safety committees in their workplaces. These committees will function to expose the management cover-up of the spread of the coronavirus, to defend workers against surveillance and retaliation by company spies, as well as to resist the efforts of the Democratic Party and their trade union affiliates to hijack and control workers’ opposition.

These committees will fight to unite all workers in the logistics industry, not just those directly employed by Amazon, in a common struggle to advance demands based on the needs of the working class, not demands of the world’s richest person for more profits.

To fight against a colossal global conglomerate like Amazon, which has its tentacles and security “partners” encircling the world, Amazon workers must reject the nationalism promoted by the unions and embrace a common struggle with their brothers and sisters in every country. Just as Amazon’s “security operations” are global, workers’ opposition must also be organized globally.



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