

Baltimore Amazon workers form rank-and-file safety committee to defend workers and save lives

Amazon BWI2 Rank-and-File Safety Committee
13 December 2020

We, the Amazonians of Baltimore, hereby announce the formation of an independent rank-and-file safety committee at the Amazon BWI2 Fulfillment Center. In launching the committee, our goal is to expose the conditions at our facility and the lies of management meant to cover them up. We are an organization of, for, and led by Amazon workers which will defend the rights and safety of our fellow employees.

In the past nine months, Amazon's global workforce has grown by nearly a third to over 1.2 million workers, making us one of the powerful and essential segments of the international working class. Throughout the pandemic, we have established ourselves as essential workers serving the needs of society as a deadly virus infected millions and forced businesses and activities to shut down.

Despite this, Amazon and its corporate leaders have treated us with disdain and abuse. In March, as the first wave of COVID-19 swept through the United States, company CEO Jeff Bezos dismissed our concerns, forcing us to continue working at break-neck speed without basic personal protections.

Meanwhile, Amazon has profited handsomely. Bezos has reached a personal wealth of \$200 billion, "earning" over \$80 billion in the past nine months alone. At the same time, according to recent company data, over 20,000 of our fellow workers have contracted COVID-19 as of October 2020.

Amazon has released false and misleading statements to the public about the safety and health measures practiced in its facilities. Workers regularly receive updates in the form of emails and text messages informing us that another coworker has been infected. We have lost count of the number of updates that we

have received.

We are sitting ducks for injury and sickness, with no exact information about which department or building has been infected at our facilities. In addition, hazard pay and unlimited unpaid time off (UPT) have been taken away.

This has occurred even as COVID-19 cases are spiking around the country and internationally as the winter season arrives. In the United States, the holiday season coincides with the busiest period of the year for Amazon employees. Workers will be forced to scramble to sort, pick, and ship untold amounts of merchandise and materials at impossibly high hourly rates in order to meet the demands set by the company's executives.

This will lead to a massive explosion of the pandemic inside Amazon's facilities and the communities surrounding them. In Maryland, businesses and other facilities have been forced back into tighter restrictions as the number of COVID-19 cases in the region has skyrocketed.

Workers at the BWI2 facility have written to the *World Socialist Web Site* and *International Amazon Workers' Voice* to share stories about the victimization and abuse that the company uses to discipline its workers. This is not acceptable and we demand a halt to all unjust firings and abusive behavior at Amazon and at all companies, both essential and non-essential.

Amazon has spared no expense in monitoring and spying on its workforce, yet gives scant attention to basic questions of health and safety. To improve this situation, the BWI2 Rank-and-File Safety Committee appeals to our fellow workers and all logistics workers to join us in fighting for the following demands:

- For a *genuine* system of testing and contract within Amazon's facilities. Workers must know, in real time, the number of cases, the department and the shift time in which a COVID-19 case has been detected. All workers known to have been in proximity to infected individuals must be allowed to quarantine for two weeks with full pay and health benefits.

- Workers unwilling to risk themselves amid the pandemic must be given paid time off with no threat of termination. Workers previously terminated for protesting and resisting Amazon's abuses must be offered reinstatement at the same wage they received prior to being fired.

- Accessible, reliable and *safe* testing for all employees. Workers must be given access to a testing system designed by medical experts that is administered in a safe and socially-distanced manner.

- Closure of facilities for necessary cleaning. If an outbreak is detected at a fulfillment center, it must be closed for at least two days and given deep cleaning with industrial grade chemical that has the approval of a public health specialist. Likewise, break rooms must be properly social-distanced and cleaned at regular intervals.

- An end to abusive speed-up. The rate system in Amazon already leads regularly to abuse, termination and injury. Amid the pandemic, the effort to drive workers to the breaking point acquires a homicidal character. Workers must be given extended break periods at the end of each hour in order to maintain their health and safety. "Time Off Task" (TOT) tracking and other forms of harassment must be abolished.

- Immediate reinstatement of hazard pay with retroactive pay increases. In May, Amazon ended its \$2 hazard pay increases as the pandemic was still spreading. Recent reports have shown that the company

trading off to quadruple its hazard pay to its workforce while still maintaining a high level of profit.

The funding for such measures exists in the bank accounts and stock portfolios of Jeff Bezos and the rest of Amazon's executives and corporate board. All wealth and profit obtained at the expense of workers during the pandemic, beginning with Bezos's billions, must be seized and used for these purposes.

We support every move by workers to protest, strike and organize in resistance to Amazon's exploitative practices. However, this does not mean support for the efforts of the corporate-controlled trade union apparatus, along with their pseudo-left supporters, to take advantage of Amazon workers' opposition in order to gain a foothold among us.

The unions, including the Teamsters, the United Auto Workers and the American Federation of Teachers, have worked hand in glove with management and with the Democratic Party to conceal information about the spread of the virus and to threaten workers into remaining on the job in unsafe conditions. This is because the unions are not workers' organizations, but labor contractors controlled by wealthy bureaucrats. Their only concern is to siphon dues money out of Amazon workers' pockets while providing nothing in return.

Instead, workers must have their own organizations, independent of the Democratic and Republican Parties of big business. Rank-and-file safety committees are beholden only to the interests of the workers who wish to fight against corporate exploitation at Amazon and other facilities.

To join the BWI2 rank-and-file safety committee or for help forming a committee at your workplace, contact us through the *World Socialist Web Site International Amazon Workers Voice*.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact