

“United we stand, divided we fall.” Amazon worker speaks out on workplace conditions, calls for global struggle by the working class

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15 December 2020

The *World Socialist Web Site International Amazon Workers Voice* recently interviewed a warehouse worker in Connecticut who wanted to expose working conditions and organize within his facility. The discussion centered around conditions in Amazon facilities during the pandemic, our call to form and build rank-and-file safety committees and the need for workers to unite on an international basis. For the purpose of protecting the worker’s safety, the name of the worker has been changed and identifying details taken out of the article.

Can you introduce yourself? How did you end up working at Amazon?

Before Amazon, I had a small business for about six years; I had to close it. After that, I worked for retail and it was a seasonal job, then I applied to Amazon for loss prevention because I have certifications [for that]. I didn’t get the job.

They just sent me a letter saying we want to hire you as a warehouse worker, so I go to get the job and it was just basically a labor job, which is better than nothing, so I took it.

You’ve told us that you’ve been working at this facility for close to a year and a half. What has your experience been like?

Um, very, very bad because they will tell you something that they’re going to take care of, and they never do. I work the night shift and managers were telling people on our shift when I first started that they could not use the restroom. People were crying and they came to me and said, “What do we do?” I went to the two ladies that are managers and told them this is breaking labor laws.

They didn’t do anything, so I wrote them up for that and with HR (Human Resources) and HR never got back to me. That was in August of 2019 when I first started.

Have you been injured while working?

Every day. I mean, you have neck, back and then I have the injury where I was in so much pain that I had to go to the emergency room, yesterday.

I first went to AmCare (the company’s healthcare) and they said they could do nothing for me, so I was limping out of the building. I had to lay in my car for three hours till I could move my vehicle and go to the local hospital emergency room.

Amazon advertises AmCare as offering great healthcare to its

workers. Do workers get adequate care from AmCare?

Zero, no care. I mean, it’s very sad because you would go in (to AmCare) and at first it looks like they would really do something for you.. . I had friends whose wrists were swollen, and they’d say “OK, here’s some ice, you gotta go back to work, you can’t leave. There was no care at all, ZERO care.

That’s what I experienced when I was in there. That’s what I experienced on my day when I was injured. I said, “I need help. I need you to help me,” and they said, “We can’t do anything for you.”

How does management monitor workers on the job?

They give us a badge and call it labor tracking, I hate to say it, but I call it slave tracking, because of the fact that they have eyes on everybody. They want to know if you’re going to the restroom, tell you that you can’t do this or do that. It’s a very, very bad situation. It’s the worst place that I’ve ever worked at.

I told my doctor that I felt suicidal because I didn’t want to work there anymore. He gave me some new medication and told me you’re going to get out of there. I said, I’ve never felt this bad my whole life. All I’ve ever done is try to help everybody.

How have things been affected by the COVID-19 situation?

The working conditions are very, very sad. They’re pushing us above and beyond the work, the fastest that you’re able to do. They wrote me up, the new manager came and told me, “What were you doing?” I told him I didn’t know what he was referring to and he said, “You usually do over 100 percent rate, but you did 86 percent recently.” I went home to check, and it turned out that the day he was referring to was my vacation day; I wasn’t even there! They’re trying to push us to make them billions and billions of dollars. But then, that’s just the world we’re living in. I have a friend of mine that works in South Windsor and his friend’s father fell dead, he had a heart attack and he died right there. In the Amazon in South Windsor!

Is management doing anything to protect workers from COVID-19?

The facilities. .. it is so crowded. There is no social

distancing. I've had workers come to me and tell me that someone who was working had COVID and the manager didn't say anything for three days. The COVID is in there. I know it's there. They [management] do not tell you who has the virus. They do not tell you how many people have the virus, they don't tell you anything about it. Because they can't, because if we have the virus, they would be forced to shut the facility down.

I tell people to wear a mask, the best thing we can do is wear a mask. .. but what management does is that they have a mass quantity of people coming in so it's very hard to protect ourselves from the virus.

There's multiple people standing so close together and they're so afraid. I have a co-worker that's an older lady, and she goes, "I'm afraid because you know, we're older and we're gonna get the virus." I tell her not to worry, I try to make her positive. I do this every day with a lot of people.

How do you know if a co-worker has COVID-19 or that they're out of the job due to injury?

People vanish, you understand? What happens is that there's so many people there that, they move them in, and they move them out. We're disposable.

Amazon workers, they're not just workers. You have a family to feed, friends and people to take care of. Let's say something happens to your family and you can't work for a week or two, how do you know that your job is secure?

I don't. There is no security here. It's terrifying. What if they shut us down for six weeks like Governor Lemont (Connecticut) is suggesting? Are we going to get paid for the time off?

We're overworked. They give you this little tiny break and I see people sleep on the table at break. I saw a guy that I truthfully thought was dead. I went over there to see him, and I shook him asking if he was okay and he didn't wake up. I got one of my friends to try to wake him and he finally woke up like he came out of a giant nightmare.

Do workers discuss these issues, the fact that Bezos is making so much off of their misery?

I would say that every second, every day, people are referring to the fact that it's the most evil job that they've ever had. I've had people come up to me and say, "What do we do?" I think the answer is simple, together we stand, divided we fall.

Can you get fired for speaking about organizing in the facility?

Yes. You'll get fired immediately. If you do get fired, they won't let anyone know. If they think you're speaking to somebody about something like that, then what they do is they move you to another area, and they keep moving you around so you're not in an area where you can speak to anybody.

We say that workers need to take control of the profit that they are producing, because then all the countless dollars hoarded by billionaires would be used to fund healthcare and benefits for Amazon workers.. . If we need to shut down the

economy because of the pandemic then we are able to provide every worker a living wage, till things are back to normal, as some examples.

Well, they did that in France. They tried to shut everything down, but Amazon tried to sue them. But I totally agree with everything you guys are saying. This is a brand new thought of moving the world forward. United we stand, divided we fall. You must take care of the people. We're being pushed and pushed over the limit, and I see so many people full of hatred, depressed, not just in America but all over the world. I agree with what you guys are saying and I believe it's going to be a very good thing; you got to do the right thing and take care of the people.

Like you had said, "United we stand, divided we fall." Who needs to unite? It's the working class! Our perspective is to unite the working class, on a global scale. We have formed rank-and-file committees internationally among teachers, autoworkers and other sections of workers so that they can issue their own demands, unite with other workers around the world to lead a complete overhaul of society as it stands.

[The global unity of the working class] is actually a beautiful feature of the world.. . I had barely thought of the things you're saying. But what you're saying is totally correct. People need to have their own committee, and we need to get together and make our own decisions.

If there's one thing you want to tell workers reading this article, what would it be?

If you do not stand together, you will not be able to change your life, you will not be able to have a goal for the future, you'll have nothing.

"United we stand, divided we fall." That's similar to what Karl Marx said: "Workers of the world, unite!"

Workers of the world, unite. I totally agree.



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