

Massive new coronavirus outbreaks at Amazon in Germany

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In the last few days, several hundred workers of the shipping giant Amazon in Germany have become infected with coronavirus. Amazon distribution center workers continue to toil under deadly conditions while Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, the world's wealthiest man, further enriches himself during the pandemic.

At least 100 of the 900-person workforce at the sorting and distribution center in Garbsen near Hannover had been infected by the time mass testing began at the plant. Despite this, the highly-automated Garbsen facility, one of the newest and most modern of its kind, has not yet been closed.

The Amazon warehouses in Bayreuth, Koblenz and Graben near Augsburg are also reporting new outbreaks, but work continues at full speed in all sorting and distribution centers.

The online retail giant Amazon is taking advantage of the so-called "shutdown" imposed by the German federal government, which has shut down in-person retail (with the exception of grocery stores). However, schools and daycare centers remain open as well as public transportation and shipping firms. In spite of the "shutdown," COVID-19 cases continue to rise, and hospitals are overcrowded. The Robert Koch Institute reported on Friday 33,777 new infections and 813 COVID-19 deaths in Germany, once again an alarming new record.

Yet, business is booming in the entire shipping industry. Much to the delight of Jeff Bezos, who is the world's richest man and CEO of Amazon. He has increased his wealth by over \$70 billion during the pandemic. Amazon now hopes to massively increase its Christmas sales.

Amazon workers' wages and health precautions will not be increased. For them, the busy Christmas period, especially under conditions of the pandemic, means

incessant stress, longer hours and putting their lives in danger. The promised Christmas bonus of 2 Euros per hour between December 9 and 22 only applies for the hours that workers are actually present. The consequence of this is that those who are sick come to work, which increases the risk of infecting others.

In order to send out all seasonal extra orders, the company has added around 10,000 temporary workers in its German distribution centers. This has caused "chaos and a lack of social distancing," as one operations manager recently put it.

This has allowed COVID-19 to spread nearly unabated. In fact, cases have increased rapidly, not only at Amazon, but also other logistics companies: at the package delivery service Hermes in Bad Rappenau, 40 workers became ill. Other companies have also reported major outbreaks, including Zalando, DPD and DHL.

Tens of thousands out of Amazon's global workforce of over one million have become infected. In the United States alone, 20,000 employees in Amazon distribution centers and the grocery chain Whole Foods, which belongs to Amazon, had contracted the virus by September 19.

An anonymous Bayreuth worker told local television station TVO: "more than 60 are sick, a number that rises every day." Describing the pressure that workers face at the large centers, he added: "There are definitively many more packages... We try to work through everything in the hall, which is difficult to do. It takes us to our physical and emotional limits."

The situation at Amazon is characteristic of the whole ruling class reaction to the pandemic. As the *World Socialist Web Site* already commented on March 6: "The indifference of the [ruling class] to the health of the population is no better, and perhaps worse, than the

attitude of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt to the slaves.” This is especially true for the world’s largest corporate giant Amazon.

The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply aggravated the class antagonisms of the capitalist system. As the WSWs said, the central concern of governments is to “protect profits, not lives.” That is why the WSWs is fighting for the creation of Action Committees in workplaces, schools and daycare centers, in order to take matters into our own hands.

These committees must be organized independently of the Verdi service workers’ union and the trade unions as a whole, which stand completely for capitalist and nationalistic programs. The fight against Amazon requires an international and socialist program. To fight for this, the WSWs has a special Amazon page and publishes the *International Amazon Workers Voice* newsletter.

To the Verdi board, the well-being of the German economy is more important than workers’ health and lives. Verdi is part of the DGB, the German trade union federation, which is financed by the state as well as by German corporations and works on their behalf to smother workers’ opposition. For eight years now, the union has regularly organized toothless, isolated strikes at Amazon. Verdi has also called strikes at six distribution centers in the four days before Christmas.

Verdi claims that workers can only protect themselves when the company agrees to bargain with the union, including for a “Good and healthy work” contract. This is fraud and a deadly trap! It means waiting for Verdi officials to decide on a way forward together with management, behind the backs of the workers. They want to reach an agreement that does not cut into Amazon’s profits and gets Jeff Bezos’ support.

While unrest in the business is growing, more has been revealed about Amazon’s intensive spying on its employees. “Motherboard,” a project of the American magazine *Vice News*, published internally leaked documents about the company’s Global Security Operations Center, showing the extent to which Amazon workers are being watched.

Amazon is attempting to detect the earliest signs of resistance through video recordings inside its facilities and through spying on workers. Every conversation about protests, ranging from those of the “yellow vests” in France and climate protests, to all strike

actions are registered with the date, time and the names of all involved. To assist in its spying program, the corporation also uses the infamous Pinkertons private security agency, known in America for its role over 150 years in spying on and physically assaulting workers.



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