

Oppose dropping of mask requirement at Amazon! Demand it show all COVID-19 cases at its warehouses!

Amazon BWI2 Rank-and-File Safety Committee
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Last month, Amazon announced that it would be relaxing mask requirements at its fulfillment centers and other facilities located in the United States. According to a text message that was sent out at the time, vaccinated Amazonians could begin going without any masks at facilities “unless mandated by state or local regulations.” This was announced even as the company refuses to release the total number of cases at fulfillment centers.

The Baltimore Amazon Workers Rank-and-File Safety Committee issues an urgent warning to Amazon workers: Amazon and the capitalist class as a whole have failed to contain COVID-19. Instead, they wish to “normalize” death and sickness and blame any further illnesses on working people. Amazon workers must oppose this!

Throughout the pandemic, Amazon has referred to us as “essential workers.” While we are glad to perform an essential service, from the beginning this term has had a double meaning. While we were forced to remain at work, Amazon refused to provide us, its workers, with basic safety requirements.

In no way has this been more obvious than Amazon’s refusal to report basic information about the pandemic to the public. Every day, Amazonians receive generic text alerts from the company which notify us of “individuals” that have tested positive in recent days for COVID-19. The company has steadfastly refused to release essential details about these cases, such as what shift and where in the building cases were detected.

Instead, the company, with ex-CEO Jeffrey Bezos, the world’s wealthiest human, in the lead, has employed public relations scams to present the corporation as an idyllic paradise where no one ever

gets sick.

In October 2020, *over eight months ago*, Amazon begrudgingly released the number of infections recorded at its warehouses through the first months of the pandemic. At the time, according to the company, over 20,000 Amazonians had gotten sick with COVID-19. Prior to this, Amazonians had to rely on the initiatives of workers and other “unofficial” means to find out the total number of cases.

Since then, we have not heard one word from Bezos or Amazon about how many cases exist. Instead, Amazon is condescendingly offering us a \$40 bonus if we report our vaccination.

As with Amazon’s recent focus on reducing work-related injuries in its warehouses, this is a way for the company to put the blame for any continued spread of COVID-19 on the workers themselves, absolving itself and its reckless policies of any of the blame. While not reducing infections, it will provide Amazon with a justification for increasing its exploitation of the workforce.

There is no reason to believe that the pandemic has ended. In the United Kingdom, the disturbing increase of instances of the Delta variant, which is said to be at least 60 percent more transmissible, proves that now is no time to let down our guard. According to Public Health England, since February a number of hospitalizations have occurred among even vaccinated people. Several cases have even proven fatal. To make matters worse here, less than half the US population is even vaccinated.

In addition to dropping the requirement for masks, we have seen the number of “social distancing” teams reduced significantly. In-person “standup” meetings at

the workplaces have returned and clearly violate the six-foot social distancing rule.

Former-Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos possesses nearly \$200 billion in personal wealth. Despite this, Bezos paid less than \$1 billion last year in personal income tax, according to the executive compensation consulting firm Equilar. Bezos's personal holdings grew by \$99 billion last year alone.

Amazonians must ask themselves: Why should we face death so that such individuals can continue to reap fortunes from our backs? Amazon relies on us to do all of the work. It is about time we laid down a few ground rules of our own.

We urge our fellow Amazonians to continue to observe all social distancing and public safety requirements in all possible circumstances. But the fight for safety cannot be left up to isolated individual efforts. Amazonians must join and form independent rank-and-file safety committees and seek to affiliate them to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

The Baltimore Amazon Workers Independent Rank and File Safety Committee was formed last year amid the pandemic. We are a workers' organization that is formed of, by and for workers, and work to defend our fellow Amazonians from the corporation's exploitation and unsafe policies in pursuit of profit.

Our committee demands the following:

? A *genuine* system of contract tracing 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.

? Paid time off, with no threat of termination, for workers unwilling to risk themselves during the pandemic. Workers must be rehired at the same wage or higher if they had been previously terminated for protesting and resisting Amazon's abuses.

? Accessible, reliable, safe testing and vaccination for all employees who desire them. *These items should be overseen and administered by medical professionals with the required background training and experience in their fields.*

? 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 deep-cleaned with no loss of pay to the workers affected.

? An end to abusive speed-up. Extended break periods at the end of every hour to maintain 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 addition, pursuant to our mission to defend our fellow Amazonians, we call upon Amazon to provide all information it has surrounding the death of Poushawn Brown, a co-worker who died after working in the company's COVID-19 testing department last winter.

We demand:

? The release of all information relating to the death of Poushawn Brown, including job requirements, on-site interactions and potential exposures. This should include internal company communications and deliberations about how it should respond to Brown's death.

? Full financial and medical support for the Brown family, paid for by Amazon.

It is clear that stopping the pandemic is a question of workers themselves asserting their rights in workplaces. We cannot rely on the Retail, Warehouse and Department Store Union (RWDSU), which launched a failed organizing drive at Amazon earlier this year, or any other pro-capitalist organization, to defend us. The RWDSU has failed to take up a single demand against Amazon. Even when a worker died at the Bessemer, Alabama facility it was trying to organize, the RWDSU kept its mouth shut and said nothing.

We encourage all Amazonians in agreement with these demands to join a rank-and-file committee in your area or contact the *World Socialist Web Site* and find out how to start one in your workplace.



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