"Neither party has any interest in saving the lives of working people"

Coronavirus outbreak at Dallas facilities of e-commerce logistics firm ShipBob as COVID-19 spirals out of control in Texas

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In the closing week of July, an outbreak of coronavirus occurred at warehouses owned by Amazon-like logistics company ShipBob in the Dallas-Fort Worth area in Texas, just weeks after a mask mandate at the facilities was lifted.

Coronavirus cases in the state of Texas have soared over the past month, after the lifting of mask mandates by the Biden administration in early July and an outright ban on local mask mandates by the right-wing Republican Governor Greg Abbott. Over the course of the entire pandemic Texas, the country's second most populous state with 29.2 million people, has more than 3.24 million cases (approximately 11.2 percent of the population) and nearly 54,000 deaths.

With the Delta variant spreading, COVID-19 hospitalizations have increased 400 percent over the last month in the state. On July 29, hospitals reported 5,662 patients hospitalized with coronavirus. A week earlier, coronavirus hospitalizations reached 3,566.

In Dallas County, COVID-19 hospitalizations have increased by 99 percent from July 14 to July 29, reaching 376 the week ShipBob management dropped the mask mandate in the plant. The local case numbers are expected to reach 1,000 by mid-August, according to forecasters at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.

In defending his ban on local mask mandates, Abbott is openly promoting falsehoods about the spread of the virus which have already been debunked by medical health experts. In an interview with KPRC-TV last month, he said, "There are so many people who have immunities to COVID, whether it be through the vaccination, whether it

be through their own exposure and their recovery from it, which would be acquired immunity," further stating it would be "inappropriate to require people who already have immunity to wear a mask." In fact, according to a leaked CDC report, over 35,000 "breakthrough" infections of the already vaccinated are being recorded every week in the United States.

After the outbreak at ShipBob, a worker from one of the three facilities, all located in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area, reached out to the *World Socialist Web Site*. His name has been changed in the following interview to maintain his anonymity.

"I've been a reader of the website for a couple years," Sam said. "With infections on the rise, and seeing that you guys report consistently on the dangers of [coronavirus] in the logistics industry, like Amazon, I felt compelled to inform the public of this growing danger.

"[We have] give or take 30 people. It's not many. There are three shifts with about 15, I think. They work 12-hour shifts for three days in a row. B shift has around 12 people, and they work two 12-hour shifts at the beginning of the week and one at the end, and C shift has about eight. They work five days a week, eight-hour shifts.

"The base pay during the pandemic was $14.50 with a $1.00 hazard pay in 2020, but in 2021 they made the extra dollar a permanent part of the wages. For the most part, a lot of people enjoy the job. The workload is relatively low compared to bigger warehouse companies, and most of the workers take [COVID-19] seriously. A lot of us kept wearing our masks even after they ended our mandate.

"[But] after the mask mandate was dropped, we had

three positive cases in the final week of July, from the 25th to the 31st. After the cases were confirmed, work management reimplemented the mask mandate. They had gotten rid of it because OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] determined that the mask mandate was unnecessary. I completely disagree with the decision because just a few short months later we're having new cases again at work.

"When someone was infected last year, management kept silent until they couldn't anymore. It's a small place. They didn't want to 'cause a panic.' They've brought back [the] full sanitation protocol, cleaning hand scanners in UV light containers, and they put back the glass dividers at the breakroom tables to space employees out. They've been providing latex gloves again, as well as multiple hand sanitizer stations.

"The management team has to work personally with a lot of the workers. I think they know what we feel, so they've started putting fans throughout the warehouse and at pack stations, as well as providing water and Gatorade. We have had to endure freezing and [sweltering] temperatures in the warehouse. It's not healthy."

When asked what he thought about the response of the Biden and Abbott administrations, Sam said, "Simple. They want us dead. Neither party has any interest in saving the lives of working people. I mean, how do you explain war? How is this any different?"

ShipBob, an e-commerce company founded in Chicago, Illinois, *circa* 2014 by Dhruv Saxena and Divey Gulati, has grown substantially in less than a decade. The company conducts operations with more than 5,000 businesses, has approximately 20 facilities, and more than 600 employees internationally, spanning the United States, Canada, Europe and Australia. It has an annual revenue of $80.2 million.

The size of the e-commerce sector has soared during the pandemic. In 2019, the US e-commerce pulled $360 billion in revenue and $431 billion in 2020, according to Statista.com. ShipBob has constructed a parallel operation and tech platform to logistics titan Amazon and has doubled its market valuation to $1 billion in the space of one year. As ShipBob grows and expands, it has poured more investments into Research and Development around software, robotics and autonomous systems.

In a September statement announcing it had raised $200 million in new capital, CEO Saxena said, "[This] will enhance our capabilities to bring world-class fulfillment to more customers, hire across teams, fuel growth, expand our software platform, scale our global fulfillment network…"

Saxena says that ShipBob has an "[Amazon] Prime"-style offering for customers. "Our customers are the brands, and we built ShipBob to support their business growth," he said. "A requisite to supporting their growth is offering fast and affordable shipping across any channel that they want to sell, so we do offer a 'Prime'-style offering to the brands that we support today. For example, ShipBob merchants can offer affordable two-day shipping directly through their website and through the marketplaces where they sell, like Amazon, Walmart, Facebook and Google."

As the e-commerce industry thrives and billions in profits are being made, workers are forced back into dangerous conditions at the workplace. With the death toll rapidly reaching one million, there are no signs of slowing, let alone shutting, production as the virus ravages workplaces. Abbott and state Attorney General Ken Paxton have sought unsuccessfully to block attempts by governments in Dallas and San Antonio to implement mask mandates in defiance of his ban. However, the state's courts have so far ruled against Abbott.

"Attention-grabbing judges and mayors have defied executive orders before, when the pandemic first started, and the courts ruled on our side—the law," Paxton said in a recent press release. "I'm confident the outcomes to any suits will side with liberty and individual choice, not mandates and government overreach." In justifying its ban on an elementary public health measure, Abbott's administration has perversely cited the 1975 Texas Disaster Act, which grants the governor emergency powers in the midst of a disaster.

The fight for a scientifically guided approach to ending the pandemic requires the direct intervention of the working class independent of both capitalist parties, which, in spite of their superficial differences, are intent on sacrificing lives to private profit. The Socialist Equality Party is fighting to build new organizations, rank-and-file committees, to develop the independent power and initiative of the working class. For more information, visit wsws.org/workers.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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