

Amazon workers strike for one day in Leipzig, Germany

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About 400 workers at Amazon in Leipzig took part in another 24-hour “warning” strike on Monday. The service sector union Verdi called for a work stoppage from the beginning of the night shift on Sunday until the end of the late shift on Monday. Similar strikes had already taken place on December 19 at other Amazon warehouses in Bad Hersfeld, Graben/Augsburg, Werne, Rheinberg and Koblenz.

Verdi felt compelled to call for limited short-term strikes in order to defuse the growing anger of the Amazon workforce. Not only are workers currently facing the flood of returned and exchanged goods following the Christmas holidays, they are working under the constant threat of contracting the highly contagious Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

Amazon has 17 logistics centres and more than 60 distribution centres in Germany with over 19,000 permanent workers, plus seasonal and subcontracted workers, and courier services. Verdi has repeatedly failed to address the exploitation of permanent and temporary workers, or the acute danger of corona infection.

There have been repeated outbreaks of COVID-19 at Amazon in Germany—most recently on January 6 at the Bad Oldesloe distribution centre in Schleswig-Holstein. There, 200 new infections were detected in the entire Stormarn district in one day, including cases of the Omicron variant. This was announced by the health department without giving any concrete information related to Amazon. Amazon has always kept information about where and how many workers have been infected carefully under wraps.

The topic of wearing masks is currently being discussed on the Facebook pages of Amazon workers: In Leipzig, masks are apparently only compulsory on walkways, but not at workstations. In other logistics

centres, the health authorities have ordered the permanent wearing of masks following COVID outbreaks. In Bad Hersfeld, for example, one worker reported that she had to wear a mask for four hours non-stop while the company made no allowances for any additional breaks to allow workers to breathe fresh air.

In order to eliminate the coronavirus and enforce safe working conditions, Amazon workers must unite internationally in a joint struggle. Similar or identical conditions of exploitation prevail in all of the company’s warehouses and shipping stations around the world, and the danger of becoming infected grows day by day. The first priority is for workers to be accurately informed about the real extent of new infections, so that they can protect themselves. Lockdowns with full compensation for all workers are needed to suppress the pandemic, combined with systematic contact tracing of all cases of infection.

The World Socialist Web Site and the Socialist Equality Parties have fought for the elimination of COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. Amazon workers must join together in rank-and-file committees that act independently of Verdi and other unions, the management and all of the bourgeois parties and politicians. These committees must then establish contact with colleagues in other logistics warehouses and factories and in other countries. The pandemic can only be defeated internationally by working together to uphold the socialist principle of lives before profit!

The service sector union Verdi wants to prevent such a struggle at all costs. Its demands on the online mail-order giant are limited exclusively to Amazon accepting a federal, industry-standard, collective agreement. Verdi has been organising isolated, short term activities in line with this demand for eight years now. The unions tactics are completely predictable and

are easily shrugged off by Amazon. The multinational can easily shift work affected by warning strikes to its other warehouses ensuring that profits remain untouched.

The works councils set up by Verdi at several Amazon sites are already working hand in hand with the corporation. This was explicitly acknowledged by the previous head of German operations, Ralf Kleber, who was recently replaced. In an interview with the business daily, *Handelsblatt*, Kleber said, 'We have works councils with whom we discuss every single step from break time to the changing rooms when necessary.' Verdi does not want to jeopardise this type of close cooperation under any circumstances.

Meanwhile, the company founded by multi-billionaire Jeff Bezos continues to perfect its divide-and-rule strategy: for example, parcel delivery workers are brutally exploited through the use of subcontracting. This was confirmed by a recent report made by the ZDF t.v. magazine 'Frontal' and Business Insider.

According to the report, subcontracted drivers work up to 11 hours a day for extremely low wages, which are arbitrarily set. One driver, for example, was promised a monthly salary of 2,000 euros, but after starting work, this sum was arbitrarily reduced to 1,600 euros. Frequently wages are paid late, sometimes weeks later. Several cases have been reported where a driver who fell ill was dismissed without notice on the same day. Reinstatement or severance pay, as well as payment of health insurance and social security contributions usually have to be fought out in court.

For example, a 48-year-old delivery driver who came to Germany from Pakistan thirty years ago, and has a family here, reported outstanding wages for five months since he started driving for various Amazon subcontractors. 'I had no problems until 2019,' the driver explained. "Then I began working for Amazon - and then it was all downhill afterwards." Amazon denies it has any sort of responsibility for subcontracted drivers.

The attitude of the company management became abruptly clear recently when an Amazon shipping warehouse in the US state of Illinois was hit by a tornado. When the weather warning arrived on December 10, 2021, Amazon management refused to cancel the shift and protect workers, or send them home in time. Instead, they were forced to stay in the poorly

built warehouse and continue working. The Edwardsville fulfilment centre was completely destroyed and six workers were killed.

The company has since pledged \$1 million to assist the surrounding community in its recovery efforts. This is the same amount that former CEO, Bezos, pockets in net worth every seven minutes.



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