

Amazon worker denied sick leave during holiday peak

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An Amazon shipping worker at the company's BWI2 warehouse in Baltimore, Maryland was denied sick leave during the Christmas peak season last year in spite of feeling ill.

Amazon's winter peak season, encompassing the period from "Black Friday" in November until Christmas time, is projected to bring the company as much as \$140 billion in the fourth quarter, an increase of around 12 percent from its numbers in 2020. The surge in Amazon's profit has inflated the stock portfolios of executives such as chairman Jeff Bezos, who is now worth over \$200 billion.

A study published last week by the global charity Oxfam writes: "Inequality of income is a stronger indicator of whether you will die from COVID-19 than age." The report mentions Bezos by name as a particular "variant" of billionaire that is "contributing to the death of at least 21,000 people each day, or one person every four seconds."

The worker, John, recently contacted the *World Socialist IAWV* after having read its recent article on Amazon's decision to cut paid COVID-19 sick leave from two weeks to seven days earlier this month.

The announcement of this policy-switch came only a few days after the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) "cravenly bowed to the interests of corporations, announcing that it would cut recommended quarantine time in half, from 10 days to five for employees infected with COVID-19."

"There is no public health basis for the CDC's new recommendations," the WSWS wrote of the CDC's decision. "Rather, they were clearly determined by the needs of the corporations, which face increasingly severe staffing shortages."

When John was denied COVID sick pay during Amazon's 2021 winter peak season, the corporation

was still in the process of revamping its sick leave policies.

"Amazon had me working even though I put in for sick leave," he said. "I was sweating with a fever and Amazon's temperature gauges didn't catch me," he said. "Amazon constantly is pushing you. That's all it cares about."

According to *Glassdoor.com*, "from the end of November to end of December is a blackout period at the Amazon fulfillment facilities. No vacation time is allowed during this period."

Tre, a member of the Baltimore Amazon Rank and File Safety Committee, explained that unless your requests for time off are "COVID-related, you can't get paid time off."

Tre recently recovered from COVID-19 and received only seven days of sick pay under Amazon's new policy. "I'm still only about 70 percent of my normal self," he said. "I've been suffering a quiet hell."

Amazon will do "whatever it takes to minimize the impact [of covid] on customers and selling partners this holiday season. It'll be expensive for us in the short term, but it's the right prioritization for our customers and partners," said CEO Andy Jassy in an earnings report statement following disappointing numbers in the third quarter.

What this "prioritizing" means in practice for John is that, in order to avoid infecting fellow co-workers, he ended up having to take Unpaid Time Off (UPT) to recover from an unknown illness. "They weren't paying me for any of the time that I had to take off," he explained. The total amount ended up being over 50 hours. "Dealing with Amazon on a daily basis is exhausting," he said.

John was finally able to obtain a test saying he was negative for Covid in early January. "I brought the note

to human resources. They told me I had to leave because I'm not clear to be here.”

A fellow BWI2 worker last July referred to the warehouse he worked in as “a tree trunk covered in ants,” in which COVID-19 spreads unchecked and workers find it impossible to contact trace or physically distance. “To this day, I know one person the company ever contacted about a potential exposure,” the BWI2 worker told the IAWV last July.

The Baltimore Amazon Workers Rank and File Safety Committee was formed in December 2020 amid Amazon's grueling peak season. The committee was formed by Amazon workers in order to defend themselves from Amazon's exploitative policies during the pandemic. Among the committee's first demands was “An end to abusive speed up.”

“The rate system in Amazon already leads regularly to abuse, termination and injury. Amid the pandemic, the effort to drive workers to the breaking point acquires a homicidal character,” the demand states.



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