

UK Amazon workers speak on wildcat walkouts and rank-and-file committees

Our reporters
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If you are an Amazon worker, we want to hear from you! Tell us here about conditions at your workplace. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Wildcat walkouts at Amazon fulfilment centres in the UK are continuing, with workers protesting the company's refusal to budge from a 35-50 pence an hour pay rise (3 percent) with inflation already close to 12 percent.

Around 200 workers staged a sit-in in the canteen at the BRS2 centre in Swindon this Monday and Tuesday, and around 100 on Wednesday. A manager at the centre, announcing the docking of wages for protestors and threatening disciplinary action, described workers as being "like animals".

Actions have been reported at centres in Bristol, Rugeley and Rugby, with workers holding up placards reading, "Fight for Amazon pay rise now", "Overworked, Underpaid, Never Heard", "We need to stand together" and "We are sitting here for our rights. Please keep sitting as a unit. These people will not listen today; then we will sit together tomorrow. All of us can get victory in this work only by being together."

Campaign teams from the *World Socialist Web Site* have been distributing the articles "Wildcat walkouts over pay at UK Amazon warehouses" and "UK Amazon walkouts continue: Build rank-and-file committees!" at fulfilment centres across the country, speaking with Amazon workers about the protests and conditions at the company. Workers have also emailed comments to the WSW.

A worker at Amazon's centre in Trafford Park in **Greater Manchester** said, "I heard about the walkout. 35 pence an hour is not acceptable because it's a multi-billion pound company. Compared to the size of the company, the workers and the work they do, they are on low pay. I'm glad they did it.

"When I came here in 2014 there were only three Amazon warehouses in the UK: in London, Birmingham and Warwick. Amazon was established on the back of its workers, otherwise it couldn't have done what it has. But as they got established, Amazon wanted more and more. When drivers are loading the vans in the morning, they have five minutes and it's not acceptable.

"You get about 300 vans loading up. There are people who struggle to do it and they get penalised. Previously there was no time limit for loading up."

The worker thought that "unions are the way forward, but they won't allow unions in there". A WSWS reporter explained that in the United States, workers at Amazon had voted not to having the unions represent them because of the rotten role they had played in selling out workers in other unionised companies. He raised the example of the GMB union and Deliveroo in Britain, signing a joint agreement saying that nothing would be done to harm the profitability of the company.

The worker replied, "That's true. They got bought didn't they? The companies just throw a load of money to the union representatives coming in. I saw that process when I was an USDAW [union] rep ages ago. The unions tend to get bought by the company. I saw a lot of stuff that shouldn't have happened. It was like they were protecting the company.

"What needs to happen is that every depot of Amazon has to be united and then you have to name a time and date and strike and that will hit them badly, it will have a massive impact."

Several workers based in Manchester also wrote into the WSWS. One explained the experience of working for Amazon on a temporary contract "extended for three months then dismissed" along with "hundreds of

others.”

He has now picked up another temporary contract. “This hiring/firing/re-hiring system is causing us much anxiety and stress, especially with the cost-of-living crisis and looming recession. Yes, the wage should be more, but most important is the stability and reassurance of having a permanent contract.”

Employment at Amazon is “hard work and should be rewarded as such.” The workers’ “number one complaint” was only having “two 30-minute breaks” when “it takes a good 10 minutes to even walk to the canteen or toilet”, so “breaks are spent walking” after being on your feet all day.

Another, responding to the call for rank-and-file committees, wrote, “The issue with Amazon is it doesn’t allow groups to unite, it has a plethora of small groups they call networks, such as the Black Employee Network, Glamazon, the LGBTQIA+ Network, and other such groups. However, nothing for the group as a whole.

“In MAN1 different groups tried to put small petitions, and signatures together but no one really knows what to do to organise each other these days.”

Another worker commented, “Amazon is treating us like slaves, not like employees. I appreciate your effort and I am with you.”

At Amazon’s **Chesterfield** centre, a worker said, “I’m grateful we have got a pay rise but it’s not enough to cover the cost-of-living expenses today. I think it’s disgusting that they are making huge profits. We are the ones that do all the hard work.

“I think we all need to stand together and become one united crowd and get back what is ours. Amazon is a big corporation and has a lot of power behind it, but if we can all stand together then eventually something will come of it.”

Another worker at the same site commented, “I think it’s disgusting to be honest: 35 pence pay increase for the amount of work we have to do is an absolute joke.

“I agree it has to be united internationally with other workers. I try and keep up to date with what’s happening with Amazon especially in America because I know they’ve got it a lot harder than we have over here. So yes we do need to unite everyone.”

In **London**, a worker at the Tilbury centre commented, “35 pence? Come on. My electricity bill went up £20 a month, and then there’s food and other

stuff. During the pandemic, Amazon made a fortune.” Another said working life was “targets, targets, targets” for not enough pay, when “bills are going up and I have two kids to look after.” They were determined to keep striking: “If they don’t pay us, okay, that’s what we’ve got to do.”

One worker explained that Amazon was moving work to centres not yet affected by walkouts, stressing the need for unified action and giving support to the idea of rank-and-file committees. Many spoke enthusiastically about organising Amazon workers internationally and said they intended to follow up the International Amazon Workers Voice.

A worker at the Wembley centre said of the walkouts, “It’s about time. It’s a multimillion-pound company; we need to work collectively. I am trying to study to be a teacher but even that is threatened today. This idea of a rank-and-file committees is new to me, but it sounds good, the right way to go.”

A driver stated, “It’s about time too; it’s been too long. No one speaks for us and we need to do something about it.”

Another said, “I think it is very good we’ve got it on the record that we raised the issue of wages in 2022. I’m working, I have two kids and a wife studying, so it’s kind of tough. And it would be more or less okay but we know that inflation is rising more, and the next review for pay is going to be next year, so for that year inflation will be raised even more.

“I’m interested in International Amazon Workers Voice and the IWA [International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees] and will tell my colleagues.”



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