

Rising protests among Amazon workers throughout the United States

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Amazon workers protested at multiple locations around the United States on Tuesday against unsafe working conditions and low pay in the face of record inflation.

The wave of protests struck the logistics employer following job actions by workers at New York City's JFK8 facility last week. Workers on the facility's night shift refused to return to work after a cardboard compactor caught fire, leaving chemical fumes and smoke lingering in the air. The company responded by suspending as many as 80 workers, including local leaders of the Amazon Labor Union.

On Tuesday, Amazon workers protested during lunch breaks at two adjacent distribution centers in Joliet, Illinois to protest inadequate pay hikes from about \$18 to \$19. Before the walkout, at least 600 workers at the facility signed petitions demanding a wage increase to \$25 an hour.

"It's us that put our bodies and minds behind this behemoth that is Amazon and keep it going, and it's not us that see the benefit of it," Cesar Escutia, an Amazon worker at the MDW2 fulfillment center, told local news station WTTW. Escutia said the facility was so unsafe that workers "wear masks, not necessarily to protect themselves from any kind of virus or disease, but because there's so much dust and small particulates."

Escutia also spoke about Amazon's workplace injury rates. Detailing his own experience after an injury, he said the company only made an "effort to bandage me up and send me back out." While the company employs roughly 30 percent of all warehouse jobs in the US, it is responsible for "nearly one-half (49 percent) of all injuries in the warehouse industry," he said, citing figures from a report by the Strategic Organizing Center union federation.

The protests in Illinois coincided with similar actions at Amazon's sprawling ATL2 fulfillment center outside of Atlanta. Workers at the facility have held regular protests outside the facility demanding wages be increased to \$25 an hour.

In September, workers walked out at ATL2 after a coworker passed out in nearly 90 degree Fahrenheit heat. According to workers at the scene, management had refused the worker's requests to go on break right before he collapsed.

Also on Tuesday, workers at Amazon's air hub in San Bernardino, California announced they would strike for higher pay and safety on Friday, October 14.

Workers at the KSBG air hub walked out in August over similar issues. In addition to Amazon's low pay, workers also demanded breaks at least every hour because of the heat. Amazon has responded to workers' demands with "intimidation, threats and retaliation," they stated.

According to the *Washington Post*, the facility is "a uniquely vulnerable point in [Amazon's] logistics network" because it is strategically located to service "outposts on the West Coast."

Protests at Amazon warehouses have been spreading across the country and internationally during the company's Prime Week sales holiday, the second such event it has held in 2022.

German Amazon workers on Monday went on strike at nine different locations against meager wage raises. According to the British *Guardian*, "German Amazon workers have repeatedly been on strike over pay and conditions—timing one recent stoppage to coincide with a public holiday in Poland so the firm could not simply transfer the work across the border."

Hundreds of Amazon workers in the United Kingdom voted this week to strike at the company's Coventry

warehouse against its refusal to recognize the GMB union and poverty-level wages of £10.50 (\$11.50) an hour.

At least 97 percent of the location's 1,400 workers support a strike at the facility, according to a consultative vote. Workers at Britain's Doncaster facility "are balloting simultaneously, and would coordinate any action with Coventry," the *Guardian* reported.

Amazon spokespeople feigned surprise of the rising tide of protests, pointing to its supposedly generous wage increases. "We value employee feedback and are always listening," a spokeswoman told Joliet's WTTW News. The company, she added, was "investing \$1 billion over the next year to permanently raise hourly pay for frontline employees."

Last month, Amazon revealed that it was giving hourly workers a raise "that it says will take average starting wage for most front-line employees in warehousing and transportation to more than \$19 an hour," according to *Bloomberg*. This will result in pay raises of less than \$1.

The money allocated for piddling raises for its 1.1 million US workers is less than a quarter of the \$4.3 billion the corporation spent last year for antiunion efforts.

"I'm sorry but people are treated unfairly in these buildings," a worker said on social media, summing up the conditions which are driving Amazon workers into struggle. "Nobody should have to be in such unbearable pain when they get off work, no matter the job! People should be allowed more break time without it being eaten up... After two years, the only thing I got out of it was a ruined body," she added.

In a statement published this week defending the victimized workers at JFK8, the *International Amazon Workers Voice* wrote, "Amazon is terrified this could spread quickly beyond Staten Island—with good reason." The IAWV called on all Amazon workers to "organize to defend their brothers and sisters at JFK8. This must be done by building a rank-and-file network of defense committees, in order to publicize information about their case and lay the scaffolding for coordinated joint actions aimed at forcing Amazon to reinstate the JFK8 workers."

This, it said, "can also be the starting point for a broader fight for Amazon workers' longstanding

demands, including: safe and clean workplaces free of deadly viruses and toxic fumes; for an end to management harassment and the oppressive rate system; and for massive pay raises to keep pace with inflation and the rising cost of living."



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