Amazon workers protest plans to close Shakopee sorting facility in Minnesota

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On February 12, workers protested the planned closure of Amazon Shakopee MSP5 warehouse in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. The decision to shut down the facility was proposed last July, and the closure was announced at the end of January. The closure is set to occur on March 31, threatening the jobs of 700 employees at the warehouse.

Responding to opposition from Amazon logistics workers, Amazon claims that the closure is due to the decision not to renew a lease from the building's owners. Amazon also claims to have opportunities for relocation to other locations for affected workers.

In the past years, the Twin Cities have been a major focal point of struggle by Amazon workers.

Workers have held various demonstrations demanding better working conditions. In 2018, Amazon workers in Shakopee protested unfair work productivity requirements as well as management's refusal to provide workers enough break time, including for religious accommodation.

In April 2020, Amazon workers in Shakopee walked out in protest over the firing of a worker who had stayed home to protect her children from COVID-19. The company reportedly agreed to rehire the worker following the protests, but it continues victimizing workers who oppose its policies.

According to the Awood Center, a non-profit defending African immigrants that has been involved in organizing a number of the protests, 60 percent of the workforce at the nearby MSP1 fulfillment Center were East African in 2018. However, workers from all ethnic and national backgrounds, as well as other workplaces, attended protests against Amazon's productivity requirements. Last May, Amazon employees in Shakopee Amazon warehouses participated in protests for payment of wages on time, and opposition to management's refusal to acknowledge time off.

Representatives of the Awood Center suggested that the shutdown of the facility was aimed at suppressing opposition among workers, writing in a statement "Amazon's decision to close this facility is wrong and retaliatory."

Steve Kelly, an Amazon public relations manager, claimed that the closing of the MSP5 facility was not a response to protests at the larger and nearby MSP1 fulfillment center.

Amazon workers at this facility who spoke with local news reporters expressed uncertainty that Amazon would follow through with offers to relocate. Such sentiments are widespread and have led to massive opposition to the impending job cuts. Amazon worker Saido Mohammed told CBS News Minnesota reporters "my preference was permitting me to work at MSP1 because of convenience… I was not given a sure answer on whether I would be rehired or transferred.

"I felt sad because the place I had been working at is being closed," Asha Ibrahim told local outlet *Sahan Journal*. Ibrahim has worked at Shakopee for a year and is trying to transfer to another facility. Amazon workers have also worried that workers' communities will be affected by the closure.

While opposition among Amazon workers in Shakopee to the closure is widespread, workers should organize by forming rank-and-file committees to effectively oppose staff cuts and increased workloads. These committees should democratically discuss and formulate the demands of Amazon workers and their struggle consciously with other Amazon workers across the US and worldwide. Amazon workers will find ready support for their struggle as well among nurses, teachers, rail and UPS workers who face similar

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attacks.

No faith should be placed in the good graces of Amazon to do the right thing. Instead, workers should base their fight on the unity of all Amazon workers and logistics workers. It is the working class that produces the wealth of Amazon, and it must be the working class that decides how it is organized.

All Amazon workers should see the closure of Shakopee MSP5 as a warning. At any moment, Amazon may leverage its power as a logistics giant and eliminate or move jobs. Amazon eliminated 18,000 tech sector workers in early January, citing an “unstable economy” created by the pandemic. In response to this development, the *World Socialist Web Site* issued a warning that this was first of many job cuts, targeting workers across many industries. These cuts should be seen as part of the coordinated counterattack by corporations against the demands by workers for increased wages and improved working conditions to make up for decades of eroding living standards.

The announced closure of the Shakopee MSP5 facility is part of a wave of mass layoffs in the largest tech and logistics giants internationally. Just in the past months, among many others Microsoft has announced it is laying off 10,000 workers, UPS is laying off its second-tier delivery drivers and Google has announced mass layoffs of 12,000 employees. Along with the Shakopee facility, Amazon is also moving forward with plans to shutter its Martorelles facility in Spain in April, eliminating 800 jobs. The UGT union bureaucracy is working closely with the company to enforce the shutdown of the fulfillment center.

Job cuts across industries are occurring during record inflation and rising costs of living internationally, exacerbated by the US-NATO drive to war with Ukraine. The ruling class is enacting a strategy to keep stock prices high amidst threats of a global recession and attempt impose cuts to living standards.

However, these attacks are being met by a growing offensive of the working class. Across the US and internationally, workers are joining a massive wave of struggle against the dictates of massive corporations and governments. Just last November, rail workers voted for a nationwide strike that was met with the rapid mobilization of the House of Representatives. Currently, across Europe, millions of workers have been drawn into demonstrations and strikes.

The way forward is the conscious unification of the working class. Amazon workers must see themselves as part of this common fight, which is not just against one or another ruthless employer, but against the entire profit driven capitalist economic system.

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