

Amazon warehouse workers speak out during Coventry, UK strike

Our reporters
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Around 600 workers at Amazon’s fulfilment centre in Coventry, England began a three-day strike Sunday, and a further three-day strike beginning April 20. The GMB trade union members demand their £11 an hour wage rate be raised to £15. Striking workers told World Socialist Web Site reporters about their low pay and terrible working conditions.

Roy said, “We need better salaries. We’re struggling to pay the bills. The inflation and job situation in this country is very difficult.

“We’ve been doing these strikes for six months since the first strike started in August last year. We’re insulted because every time we get a pay rise it’s 30 pence or 50 pence. In the last two years we’ve had a total 80 pence pay increase. Now, because of the strike, we got 50 pence more.

“Amazon management constantly pressures us to increase the output rates. Nobody can achieve a 100 percent rate constantly—we are not machines. It doesn’t matter whether we’re tired, we have to push for more. We compete with robots.

“During the pandemic, we doubled all their targets! At this time, we didn’t know who had COVID-19 and who didn’t. Not enough was done to keep us safe.

“The strikes helped alleviate the pressure from management. Now that they gave us a small pay rise, they think it’s resolved. But we are pushing for more.”

Toju explained, “Amazon sometimes gives us bonuses instead of permanent pay rises. They claim that our insurance and other benefits make up for the low pay. What we need is money to pay our bills and fulfil our families’ needs!

“COVID-19 hasn’t gone, it’s still here. Two of our friends caught COVID-19 recently, but it’s not taken seriously. You have to prove that you’ve contracted the virus with documentation. They took some measures

during the worst of the pandemic, but now if you get sick you’re on your own. They won’t pay for it.

“We work in an overcrowded warehouse with thousands of workers with poor air ventilation. If someone sneezes on a packing station, we have to clean things ourselves.

“Workers from other fulfilment centres support the strike. They are also dissatisfied.”

Nick said, “We’re here for pay and conditions inside the warehouse. Bills and living costs are going up so we struggle to live. We have nothing left after paying for bills and food. We’re forced to work 50 or 60 hour weeks just to live, which is unfair.

“Our experiences during the pandemic showed the priorities of the company. Amazon was part of the dodgy classification of warehouse operatives as ‘key workers’ during the lockdowns. The idea was that we send out medicines and health supplies, but most of our parcels contained standard retail items. Occasionally, we shipped the odd rubber glove or PPE mask.

“You can catch COVID-19 at work, take it home, and spread it to those you live with. Amazon insisted we go to work anyway, or we don’t get paid. Even if you caught COVID-19, they’d find a way to keep you at work by insisting on us being able to show evidence and symptoms before providing sick pay.”

Amazon management creates a stressful environment for workers, imposing constant surveillance to monitor performance. This week the House of Commons Business Committee published a report stating, “There is evidence to suggest that its [Amazon’s] surveillance practices (for whatever intention they are deployed) are leading to distrust, micromanagement and, in some cases, disciplinary action against its workers.”

Nick confirmed this: “Management constantly questions our movements. They expect us to work

faster, faster, faster. Every minute is about speed, numbers, and rates. Going to the toilet is almost frowned upon.

“I agree [with the WSWS] that it's the workers who produce the wealth of society. We're like the worker ants in the factories. We need numbers to get a broader political movement going.”

Amari said, “I'm here to support the strikers, fight back against Amazon, and oppose the disrespectful way that they treat people.

“I've worked here since it opened in 2018 and I've seen it all. Amazon acts unfairly by hiring people, making them think they're going to get permanent jobs, and then sacking them within three months.

“It was worse in the pandemic, which they used as an excuse to sack people citing arbitrary regulations, such as social distancing rules that management didn't follow themselves. It's one rule for them, and another one for us.

“They doubled their share values and made record profits through that whole time while we got nothing. Workers produced so much money and they took it, giving nothing back.”

Andrei said, “Strikes and protests are happening all over. I'm not just talking about Amazon workers alone. There are teacher strikes, on the transportation system, and everywhere.”

Amazon workers: contact us to discuss the conditions in your workplace and to take this struggle forward. Sign up for the International Amazon Workers Voice newsletter.



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