Hundreds of Amazon workers walk out at company's Seattle, Washington headquarters

Bryan Dyne, Diana Green
1 June 2023

Are you a worker at Amazon? Tell us what your working conditions are like by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Several hundred Amazon workers at the company's Seattle headquarters walked off the job Wednesday afternoon to protest the company's enforced return to in-person work and its retreat on previous pledges regarding reducing carbon emissions.

The event was organized by two groups, Amazon's Remote Advocacy and Amazon Employees for Climate Justice (AECJ). They appealed to workers via Slack and email and received pledges to participate in the walkout from nearly 2,000 Amazon employees around the world, including about 1,000 in Seattle. The walkout itself consisted of somewhere between 300 workers, according to Amazon's estimate, and 1,000 workers, the organizers' estimate.

The speeches at the rally largely focused on Amazon's climate policy, which includes abandoning its so-called Shipment Zero plan to have its shipping be carbon neutral. Similarly, the company stopped a clean energy bill in Oregon that would have required its data centers to have clean energy standards by 2030. The speeches were also interspersed with various chants, such as "sound the alarm."

Many of those attending carried placards with messages including "Earth's best employer? Stop the PR and listen to us" and "Amazon, strive harder." AECJ also had a sign demanding, "Amazon: Enough short term thinking. Listen to your employees. Stop greenwashing."

Attendees at the rally were also concerned for the state of their own health and that of their friends, family and coworkers. Many spoke about the danger of COVID-19 for those who are disabled and who have to work in-person, as well as those who have family members that are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic.

Others commented that the move back into the offices should not be forced on those who, for whatever reason, do not feel safe returning to in-person work. The threat of Long COVID was a common refrain. Amazon rarely releases public figures on its workplace coronavirus infection and death statistics, but the most recent revelation estimated 20,000 infections from October 2020, only a few months into the pandemic. It is very likely that most or nearly all of its 1.5 million workforce have been infected, especially warehouse workers who work in poorly ventilated conditions.

The company also cut its paid leave for coronavirus infections in May 2022, promoting an even greater spread of the deadly disease as Omicron and its many subvariants were emerging and circulating worldwide.

Amazon is a vast logistics company and a massive technology company, both aspects of which produce immense amounts of greenhouse gas emissions. Data from the website Climatiq shows that while the logistics industry, of which Amazon plays a major role, causes 2.4 percent of yearly greenhouse gas emissions, data centers such as those that host Amazon Prime and Amazon Web Services can account for up to 3.7 percent of yearly greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2019, a previous walkout organized by Amazon Employees for Climate Justice forced the company to create its Climate Pledge, which claimed the company would be carbon net zero by 2040. Since then, Amazon has walked back on these pledges even as it has sharply expanded its shipping and internet-based sectors during the pandemic, causing its emissions to rise by 40 percent.

Kshama Sawant was also present at the rally, taking a group shot for Socialist Alternative's Workers Strike Back initiative. As of this writing, however, there has been no mention of the rally at Amazon headquarters on the social media pages of either Sawant, Socialist Alternative or Workers Strike Back. That the group came to the rally for a photo shoot and has not made a statement

© World Socialist Web Site

of support reinforces the characterization of the group by the WSWS as having a “non-socialist program consistent with the platitudes of most Democratic [Party] primary challengers.”

The walkout comes after a series of back and forth memos between Amazon employees and corporate leadership. A petition from employees to drop the return-to-office mandate was signed by 5,000 employees by the day after the order was announced in February and ballooned quickly to more than 30,000 signatures. In response, Beth Galetti, head of Amazon human resources, wrote to the staff that the change “will result in long-term benefits to increasing our ability to deliver for our customers.”

In reality, the return-to-office mandate is to bolster Amazon’s stock price, which fell sharply in 2022 from $183 to $84 per share and only rose back to $120 after the company cut 27,000 workers starting last year. The most recent round of cuts include 9,000 jobs among office workers, many of whom were hired during the lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. At the time, Amazon was hiring a more geographically distributed workforce as all work was being done remotely. But as the back-to-work drive intensifies at Amazon and across every company, those not at the main campuses in Seattle, New York and Northern California are increasingly being let go.

The walkout also comes amid a wave of opposition by workers to the assault on jobs at tech companies across Silicon Valley and beyond. As the deliberate recessionary policies of the US government continue apace, even more traditionally well-off tech workers are being thrown into struggle alongside their fellow Amazon warehouse workers, as well as their brothers and sisters at Clarios and Dana and those fighting in Britain, France and elsewhere in the world.

Are you a worker at Amazon? Tell us what your working conditions are like by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site