

Amazon CEO Andy Jassy orders end to remote work in the midst of a new wave of COVID-19

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In an example of ruling class arrogance and brutality, Amazon CEO Andy Jassy has ordered employees who have been working remotely to come back into the office or find another job in the midst of a new wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In an internal recording obtained by the web site Insider, Jassy proclaimed, “It’s past the time to disagree and commit. And if you can’t disagree and commit, I also understand that, but it’s probably not going to work out for you at Amazon because we are going back to the office at least three days a week, and it’s not right for all of our teammates to be in three days a week and for people to refuse to do so.”

While most Amazon employees have been forced to show up in person at warehouses and other facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, exposing them to the danger of infection, disease and death, many office staff have been able to work remotely. Indeed, a year ago, Jassy had stated that he had no intention of ordering those working remotely to return to the office, though he left open the possibility that might change, stating, “We don’t right now. But we’re going to proceed adaptively as we learn.” However, in July of this year, Amazon employees were informed that they would be forced into “voluntary resignation” if they refused to come into the office unless they had special permission, a rare occurrence.

Jassy is not alone. During the same meeting in which he announced his “comply or leave” policy, Jassy stated that his decision was based on discussions with between 60 and 80 other CEOs, and that “virtually all” indicated that they wanted their staffs back in the office. Corporate demands that remote workers come back in-person have been increasing since the “end of

the pandemic” proclaimed by the Biden administration. This flies in the face of clear evidence that another major wave of COVID-19 is currently underway.

Recently, companies such as Meta, parent of Facebook, Disney and Zoom have publicly reversed previous remote work policies, to bring their workers back into the office at least part time.

The corporate and financial elites constantly repeat the mantra of the advantages of in-person interactions between workers physically in an office setting, implying that this is being done for the benefit of the workers. For example, as quoted by NPR, Zoom’s Chief People Officer Matthew Saxon, effused, “What we’ve found is, people have enjoyed coming back to the office. There is a buzz. There’s something about being able to go have lunch with your teammates.” This from an executive of a company that has thrived on providing software to support remote work during the pandemic.

While there are certainly advantages to the in-person working environment, little or nothing is said by these same executives about the very real danger to health and life by the “super-spreader” environment that is created. Furthermore, the danger exists not only for the workers themselves, but for their families and friends outside of work. This has resulted in an ideal environment for the continuing spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus which is mutating at an accelerating rate into potentially ever more contagious and malignant variants.

Moreover, instead of implementing a comprehensive public health program on a world scale, as has been advocated by the WSWs from the start of the pandemic, the overarching capitalist imperative to

maximize the extraction of surplus value through the direct, dictatorial supervision of its workers bleeds through the feel-good statements about the joys of in-person work settings. The “big brother” surveillance of the workforce is increasingly being extended beyond the physical confines of the office or factory setting to include GPS tracking and onboard cameras at UPS and USPS, for example.

The hypocrisy of the ruling class with regard to the pandemic is exemplified by the contrast between the stringent measures taken to protect the world’s financial and corporate elite from contracting COVID during the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland last January (UV lamps, high quality ventilation and air filtration, masking, repeated testing), on the one hand, and the lack of such measures at workplaces and schools. Both of the latter have been demonstrated time and again to be locations of high rates of transmission. Limited measures to suppress the spread of COVID-19 forced by workers during the initial stages of the pandemic have been totally eliminated, to be replaced by a brutal “profits before lives” policy, with the collaboration of the trade union bureaucracies.

The arrogant and callous treatment of Amazon office workers is of a piece with that of its warehouse workforce. Amazon has the highest employee turnover rate in the logistics industry. The company has been steadily eliminating the very limited protective measures it instituted early in the pandemic. The death of Baltimore Amazon worker Poushawn Brown from COVID-19 exemplifies the company’s brutal indifference to the spread of the pandemic at its worksites.

Workers at Amazon, regardless of whether they are office or warehouse workers, can only defend themselves by forming worker-run rank-and-file committees independent of the existing trade unions, including the Amazon Labor Union. The ALU, initiated following a walkout by workers at JFK8 on Staten Island led by Chris Smalls to protest the dangerous working conditions during the initial phase of the pandemic, has no program to defend the interests of the workers it supposedly represents. Instead, it has turned into an appendage of the existing bureaucratic trade unions and the Democratic Party.

A program to form such a rank-and-file committee at

Amazon has been proposed as part of building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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