

Amazon urged its workers to write Christmas lists to its corporate mascot

Joshua Rodriguez
27 December 2023

As the holiday season comes to a close, millions of workers are facing financial hardship throughout the United States. Faced with the inability to make ends meet the rest of the year on poverty wages, many working class households are simply unable to afford the added expenses of travel, holiday meals and Christmas gifts. This is the product of massive levels of social inequality and exploitation on a scale which many Americans in an earlier period believed had been abolished.

A holiday “charity” scheme by online retail giant Amazon, infamous for its cheap labor and technologically-enforced speedup regime in its warehouses, peels back the veil on the contempt and condescension with which the capitalist ruling class regards workers. According to a recent article in the *Guardian*, “Amazon is asking workers experiencing hardship to write a letter to its company mascot, Peccy, this holiday season so ‘some of their holiday wishes can come true.’”

The newspaper cites a flyer distributed at an Amazon warehouse in Rock Tavern, New York, which declares: “Are you or someone you know facing financial hardship this holiday season? Peccy wants to help! Write a letter to Peccy. If the Peccy team selects you, some of your holiday wishes could come true!”

Amazon’s patronizing contest casts itself in the role of Santa Claus and workers in the role of children, whom, through invasive monitoring technologies, the company “knows who’s been bad or good.” It is not the first time that the company has sponsored such a letter-writing competition, with at least one other promotion being sponsored last year, according to social media posts from that time.

Unsurprisingly, it provoked denunciations from SWF1 employees. “It’s startling to see them shell out

all this money to promote Amazon, get us excited about Amazon, but not actually give us what would endear us to Amazon, which would be a living wage,” Amazon worker Keith Williams told the *Guardian*.

“All we’re just asking for from Amazon is to do what they’re clearly able to do with the billions of dollars that they have. We just want to share in some of the efforts that we do for Amazon,” Williams continued. “We want wages. Not trinkets.”

According to the same article, “In Amazon’s most recent quarter, the company tripled its profits to \$9.9bn, and revenues for the three months ending 30 September topped \$143bn,” and that “the astronomic wealth of the Amazon founder and chair, Jeff Bezos, [is] a net worth of about \$172bn.”

If workers at giant multinational corporations like Amazon are unable to afford holiday-related expenses—or, for that matter, housing, as is often the case—then the cause is the exploitation by Amazon itself. The company prides itself on its high employee turnover rate, as it forces workers to rush past the point of endurance in order to “make rate” only to throw them out onto the street without workers’ compensation once they are injured on the job. The brutal conditions at Amazon have also claimed workers’ lives, such as that of 19-year-old Jerrold George Dejean at a warehouse in South Carolina and 20-year-old Caes Gruesbeck in Fort Wayne, Indiana, this year.

On the basis of this exploitation, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos has become the richest individual in human history, with a net worth of more than \$170 billion as of November. That is more than \$100,000 for each Amazon worker on the planet.

Now, in an attempt to garner positive press for its “generosity,” the company has thrown a few table

scraps, a tiny fraction of this sum back to the workers from whom it was stolen.

But Amazon’s “charity” contest is notable perhaps only for the degree of crudeness. The function of charity as a *whole* has always been to provide a public cover for the exploitation of the ruling class. As Friederich Engels, the co-thinker of Karl Marx, wrote in 1845 in his *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*:

The English bourgeoisie is charitable out of self-interest; it gives nothing outright, but regards its gifts as a business matter, makes a bargain with the poor, saying: “If I spend this much upon benevolent institutions, I thereby purchase the right not to be troubled any further, and you are bound thereby to stay in your dusky holes and not to irritate my tender nerves by exposing your misery. You shall despair as before, but you shall despair unseen, this I require, this I purchase with my subscription of twenty pounds for the infirmary!” It is infamous, this charity of a Christian bourgeois!

Engels scathingly characterized this as “sucking out their [the working class] very life-blood and then practicing your self-complacent, Pharisaic philanthropy upon them, placing yourselves before the world as mighty benefactors of humanity when you give back to the plundered victims the hundredth part of what belongs to them!”

Affairs, if anything, have only degenerated since Engels wrote the above. In recent decades, the “nonprofit sector” has been oriented more and more explicitly towards creating a business environment more favorable for the bottom line of the corporate “donors.” Known in the industry by the euphemism “venture philanthropy,” this has motivated billions in spending in the charter school privatization of public education. It has also led to the increasing domination of universities and other academic institutions by billionaire donors, many of whom are now demanding the expulsion of students protesting the genocide in Gaza as a condition for future “charity.”

A recently leaked memo from Amazon titled,

“Community Engagement Plan 2024—Southern California,” reveals the company’s own “charity” is motivated by the same basic considerations. The leaked memo laid out Amazon’s plans to donate to community groups, school districts, institutions and charities in the Inland Empire and support sympathetic politicians to burnish the company’s reputation and ensure that it is seen as “the most trusted community and business partner in the Southern California area.”

The leaked memo mentions prominent Inland Empire politicians by name, including Perris, California Mayor Marty Vargas, which the leaked memo regards as “an influential elected leader that we have cultivated through PPE donations to support the region, touring him and his team, and ongoing engagement.”

The exposure comes amidst a growing wave of strikes and work stoppages around the globe. At Amazon, the company is waging a determined campaign against workers seeking to organize against management. In this context, Amazon donations can best be described as “reasonable investments,” or “common business transactions,” in the eyes of Amazon and their billion dollar owners who wish to expand the company’s bottom line.

Charitable contributions from capitalists such as Bezos promotes the illusion that the very same class of people who are responsible for the social misery of billions of workers around the world can fix the poverty that they have created by returning a small percentile of their ill-gotten wealth back to charitable organizations of their choosing.

What is the root cause of this? It is the capitalist system. Amazon and other huge corporations must be expropriated and placed under public ownership under the control of workers themselves who will determine that all production is directed to meet human need, not private profit.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact