

Amazon announces shutdown of all its facilities in Quebec, eliminating more than 4,500 jobs

Hugo Maltais, Louis Girard
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The American-based online retail giant Amazon announced late last month the impending closure of all seven of its Quebec facilities, including its Montreal delivery centre and its DXT4 warehouse in the Montreal suburb of Laval.

Within two months, Amazon will eliminate the jobs of 1,700 permanent and 250 temporary employees. If one adds the people who will be made redundant at subcontractors who carried out Amazon deliveries in Quebec, more than 4,500 workers will lose their livelihoods.

Amazon chose to shut down all its facilities in Quebec, Canada's second most populous province, after suffering legal setbacks in its efforts to block unionization efforts at several of them.

Last May, the *Tribunal administratif du travail* (TAT—provincial labour board) rejected Amazon's challenge to the certification of a Confederation of National Trade Unions (CNTU) affiliate at its Laval warehouse—which should have set in motion the process for negotiating a first collective agreement at any Amazon facility in North America.

Then in August, the TAT fined the company \$30,000 for interfering with unionization efforts at a delivery centre in Montreal, including holding a meeting at which managers sought to intimidate workers into refusing to unionize. The *Globe and Mail* reported having obtained photos showing posters put up by Amazon in the toilets with the message that unions “can't change anything in the workplace” and that they “take dues.”

Meanwhile, negotiations at the Laval warehouse remained at a standstill. While the union proposed a 30 percent wage increase (from \$20 to \$26 an hour), Amazon “offered” 0 percent. “We couldn't agree on anything, not even on the definition of terms, let alone wages,” explained CNTU President Caroline Senneville.

The union took the decision in January to appeal to the Quebec Minister of Labour, writing on its website that it “was about to file a request for collective agreement arbitration, a provision provided for in the Quebec Labour Code”.

Amazon's response—a total shutdown and massive job destruction—is a declaration of war on workers, not just in Canada, but around the world.

Amazon has indicated that with the closures it will return its operation in Quebec to an entirely “third-party distribution model.” Henceforth it will have no employees in Quebec per say.

Orders will be filled from outside the province and all deliveries will be carried out solely by “subcontractors” with no employment ties to Amazon, and legally none of the minimal protections and social benefits provided workers under provincial labour law—all in order to maximize shareholder profit.

As it is, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos is the world's second richest person, with a mega fortune of over \$250 billion.

Bezos and the \$2 trillion behemoth he leads apply the dictatorial principles of oligarchic rule: any effort by Amazon workers to voice their needs and fight against the hyper-exploitative conditions under which they work is to be ruthlessly crushed.

Predictably, the CNTU has responded by attempting to limit and isolate worker opposition. Some two weeks after Amazon's closure announcement the union initiated a toothless boycott campaign, which appeals to government agencies and companies to end any supplier-contracts they have with Amazon. Apart from a small rally, the union has called just one protest demonstration that is to be held in Montreal on February 15, almost a month after the closure announcement. No union outside Quebec has proposed any joint struggle, which comes as no surprise given the key role the union bureaucracies have played for decades in enforcing the artificial division of the predominantly French-speaking workers in Quebec with workers throughout the rest of Canada.

Amazon workers in Quebec, whose jobs are now under the axe, face the same horrific working conditions the company imposes on its 1.3 million workers worldwide—including industrial robotics and invasive tracking systems to monitor workers and force them to “make rate.”

To maintain this regime of savage exploitation, Amazon won't hesitate to bypass the mechanisms traditionally used by big business to impose its diktats—compliant unions, company-friendly laws and arbitrators who lean heavily on the employer's side.

It is no coincidence that Amazon announced its job massacre in Quebec just days after Donald Trump's inauguration as president of the United States, a ceremony attended by Bezos, Elon Musk and other multi-billionaires to signal their full support for Trump and his agenda of social counter-revolution.

The arrival of this fascist in the White House for a second term signifies the violent realignment of the American political system to match the oligarchic nature of American society—a capitalist society in which the three richest people, including Bezos,

collectively own more wealth than the poorest 50 percent of the population combined.

Trump's ultra-reactionary policies—mass deportations of immigrants, nullification of constitutional rights by executive order, trade war, threats of military invasion of Greenland and the Panama Canal, and annexation of Canada—serve as an accelerant to a violent turn to the right by ruling classes everywhere.

A striking example is provided by the response of Quebec Premier François Legault, himself a multi-millionaire and former CEO of Air Transat, to the announcement of Amazon's closure of all its facilities in the province.

Legault initially ignored reporters' questions about Amazon, instead making arrogant jokes about hockey games and orange juice (a reference to the impending trade war between Canada and the US). Criticized, Legault later pretended to apologize while declaring that Amazon's elimination of nearly 4,500 jobs was simply "a business decision by a private company."

This is the same Legault who in December welcomed Justin Trudeau's federal Liberal government's arbitrary and patently illegal use of a section of the Canadian Labour Code to break a nationwide postal workers' strike. Legault mused openly about the benefits of introducing into Quebec law similar powers to criminalize strikes.

As for the unions, they won't lift a finger to defend the sacked workers. The CNTU's initial response consisted of a press release in which it "strongly denounces" the closures, but proposes no concrete action other than a legal challenge to Amazon's decision before the TAT, a pro-business institution that has no power to countermand the closures or impact Amazon in any meaningful manner. There followed the announcement of the provincial boycott—confined to Quebec and openly promoted in nationalist terms as a means of boosting "Quebec businesses—and the February 15 Montreal demonstration.

Like the other unions, the CNTU repudiated any association with genuine working class struggle decades ago. Its nationalist, pro-capitalist strategy has proved utterly impotent in the face of the globalization of production and the emergence of transnational corporations like Amazon, which can move its warehouses and reshuffle its supply chains in any of the 50 countries in which it operates in order to weaken workers and pit them against each other.

The unions' response to capitalist globalization has been to integrate themselves with corporate management and the state. In the name of ensuring "social peace" and corporate "competitiveness," i.e., profitability, they have imposed round after round of contract rollbacks and job cuts and sabotaged worker opposition to austerity budgets and the dismantling of public services.

Union leaders, including CNTU bureaucrats like Senneville, enjoy cordial relations with employers and governments, which guarantee them many financial privileges. For these bureaucratic apparatuses, the unionization of new sections of workers, such as those at Amazon, is an additional source of dues and a means of offering their services to the capitalist ruling elite as their corporate police in the workplace.

It was in pursuit of this aim that the CNTU planned to appeal to

François Legault's ultra-right-wing, fiercely anti-worker government to resort to binding arbitration to impose a first "collective agreement" at the DXT4 warehouse in Laval. This pro-business procedure serves to maintain the fiction that workers can defend their interests through "collective bargaining." But time and again, arbitration has been used as a mechanism to impose the demands of the bosses.

The union apparatuses reject the only viable strategy for workers—that based on the class struggle.

They are viscerally opposed to Amazon workers in Quebec appealing to their true class allies: workers across Canada, like the 55,000 postal workers who led a militant strike a month ago, or the hundreds of thousands of Amazon employees in North America and internationally.

Faced with the impending closures, Amazon workers in Quebec must form their own rank-and-file committees, completely independent of the union apparatus. The task of these committees will be to make contact with Amazon workers around the world, and with workers in the logistics sector like those at Canada Post and Purolator, in order to organize a real struggle to preserve jobs and working conditions for all.

As we wrote in an article, "Amazon and Starbucks strikes in US portend escalation of global class conflict in 2025":

The fight against these corporations and the ruling class as a whole requires the mobilization of the collective strength of the entire working class. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is fighting to build a counter-offensive of the rank and file through the establishment of committees in every workplace.

These committees must organize the necessary actions to abolish the "make rate" system at Amazon, end the casualization of labor at both companies and secure livable wages for all workers. Through the IWA-RFC, workers will establish direct lines of communication and coordinate their struggles across national borders. These committees will fight for workers' power against management attacks and sellouts by union officials.

Such a mobilization must be combined with a political struggle against the capitalist system, to break the stranglehold of giants like Amazon on society and expropriate the ill-gotten fortunes of Bezos, Elon Musk and Co., as part of a radical reorganization of the global economy to make meeting social needs, not profit, its animating principle.



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