

Amazon workers force temporary shutdown after death at JFK8 warehouse

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Amazon workers, take up the fight for rank-and-file control! Get started building a rank-and-file committee at your workplace by filling out the form below.

A worker died at Amazon's JFK8 fulfillment center in Staten Island, New York City last Wednesday evening. Following the death, workers on two successive shifts forced management to temporarily shut down the facility for most of the following day. Workers were able to win compensation for the closed shifts from management.

The worker has been identified as Leony Salcedo-Chevalier, 34, a father of two daughters. He was struck by a box truck as it was backing up into the loading dock at around 11:00 p.m. Salcedo-Chevalier was rushed to Richmond University Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead. The driver remained at the scene. Preliminary accounts suggest that Salcedo-Chevalier was in the driver's blind spot, and no arrests have been made.

Both the victim and the truck driver were employed by subcontractors and were not direct Amazon employees. Several thousand employees work at JFK8, which made international news in 2022 when they became the first Amazon facility in the US to vote to join a union.

The walkouts were nominally sanctioned by the Amazon Labor Union (ALU-IBT Local 1), which has since merged with the Teamsters union, but the push to close the facility was largely spontaneous. This reflects not only the determined mood among workers at the facility. It expresses the seething anger among workers across the country, especially as the Trump administration carries out its war against the working class.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with Amazon workers outside JFK8 on Saturday about the preventable death.

One worker said:

JFK8 was closed from 11:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. the next day, when the new shift started. ... Workers were angry. The bulletin board was filled with notes talking about the lack of respect shown by the management toward the guy who was killed and about forcing us to go back so quickly after it happened.

They pretend to care about safety, but they don't. They put the responsibility on individual workers. They walk around telling people, "You're not wearing the correct shoes" and little things like that, and that's supposed to

prove they care about safety. But they don't do anything when it comes to the bigger safety issues they're responsible for—like making sure one of their own trucks doesn't run an employee over.

Another JFK8 worker said:

My friend works at Costco, and there they have fluorescent vests with flashers attached to them. So, even if you're in a blind spot of a truck, the driver knows you're there because they can see the light from the flashers. They don't use those here. You just get the fluorescent vests.

A worker from LDJ5, an Amazon sorting center across the street from JFK8, said:

I didn't even know about it until today because I'm just coming back to work. It's terrible. They should have shut the whole place [JFK8 and LDJ5] down.

Injuries, including being struck by equipment, are a regular occurrence, he said.

Sometimes you get hit [by something at work], and you think you're okay, but you wake up the next morning, and your ankle is all swollen. But if you try to do anything about it, they say, "Well, you told the manager and the aid station you were okay."

His friend added:

The same night the guy was run over at JFK8, there was an accident [at LDJ5] that could have easily killed someone too. A truck started pulling away from the loading dock with its doors open, and a cart on it flew out and smashed

into a gate. If somebody was standing there, they would have been crushed.

He concluded:

It's profit over people! It's about the 1 percent taking 40 percent of all the wealth in the country.

The WSWS also spoke to a JFK8 cleaning crew, members of the 32BJ SEIU union. They said:

The workers were angry about the accident, so they were allowed to go home. ... [But] We had to go to work. The cleaning crew and the mechanics had to go to work.

The death and the workers' response to it demonstrates that workplace safety must be enforced through workers' control over conditions. As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in "Amazon JFK8 workers at a crossroads: Which way forward?":

Any workplace injuries are unacceptable! Amazon has the highest injury rate in the logistics industry, and a rank-and-file committee of workers must oversee and ensure safety conditions. If any injury takes place, it should be thoroughly investigated, the managers responsible should face accountability and consequences, and the worker should be fully compensated by Amazon (medical expenses plus paid sick leave).

Amazon is the poster child for high-tech exploitation, in which robots and surveillance systems are used to force workers past the point of injury, struggling to "make rate." It is well known that workers who are injured at Amazon are practically thrown out on the street, while one of the world's largest corporations denies them workers' compensation.

The worker's death at JFK8 is only the latest in a long line of work-related injuries and deaths at Amazon. In the sweltering summer of 2022, for example, three Amazon workers at company facilities in New Jersey died due to excessive heat in their work areas, with the company denying responsibility.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has reported extensively on conditions at Amazon, including a widely read interview with whistleblower Shannon Allen in 2018.

Amazon responds ruthlessly to all expressions of opposition. This was shown, for example, in its unpaid suspension of as many as 80 workers, who refused to return to work immediately after a 2022 fire at the same JFK8 facility. Meanwhile, founder Jeff Bezos, one of the world's richest individuals, has thrown his support behind Trump, who is systematically dismantling all

regulatory agencies even partially limiting the operations of American corporations.

At the beginning of the month, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) fired a staggering 880 of its 1,100 employees, who conduct critical research and make recommendations for the prevention of workplace injury, illness and death.

The incident last week is only the latest preventable disaster in the three years since the Amazon Labor Union won the union election. Workers voted for ALU because they saw it as a more militant rank-and-file alternative to the established, bureaucratically controlled unions.

But as soon as it won the election, ALU quickly established ties to the Democratic Party and the official union bureaucracy. This proved disastrous for JFK8 workers because ALU's embrace of pro-corporate union officials and politicians led quickly to the evaporation of its ties to the rank and file. A series of subsequent union elections, premised on endorsements from local Democrats and the AFL-CIO, ended in disaster, including one vote at LDJ5 across the street only a short time later.

After running low on money and wracked by internal factional divisions, ALU merged with the Teamsters last year in a de facto bailout to become ALU-IBT Local 1. The Teamsters and its General President Sean O'Brien are top allies of the Trump White House and have helped destroy tens of thousands of jobs at UPS since ramming through a contract in 2023.

Meanwhile, the ALU-IBT has yet to win its first contract, leaving JFK8 workers without a strategy to carry their fight forward.

If tragedies like the death of Salcedo-Chevalier are to be prevented, the rank-and-file initiative shown in last week's shutdown must find an organized form. This means the development of rank-and-file committees, uncontrolled by the Teamsters bureaucrats and their junior partners in the ALU-IBT leadership, to impose workers' control over safety by taking all actions which workers democratically decide are necessary.

A rank-and-file committee at Amazon must link up with the growing movement of the working class against oligarchs like Bezos and Elon Musk, who, through Trump, are seeking to build a dictatorship in the United States.

Such a movement requires the independence of the working class from Trump's enablers in the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy and the rejection of Trump's "America First" poison. Amazon workers in America must link up with their brothers and sisters at Amazon and in other industries around the world in a common fight against exploitation and dictatorship. This fight is being organized by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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