

# Seasonal workers at Amazon face grueling quotas and draconian computerized surveillance

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*Are you an Amazon or other logistics worker? Contact the WSWS to tell us about your working conditions.*

Amazon, the second-largest employer in the US, announced plans in October to hire 250,000 workers across the United States for the holiday season, including warehouse workers and drivers.

The jobs are mostly temporary, with seasonal workers paid around \$19 an hour on average. Amazon workers face grueling quotas and draconian computerized surveillance techniques, used to enforce productivity during the peak holiday season with resultant injury rates double the industry average.

Many workers are forced into seasonal work due to the unavailability of decent-paying full-time jobs, or to supplement their income due to the skyrocketing cost of living. A November survey by Talker Research found that 60 percent of seasonal employees report they need to do seasonal work just to pay for necessities through the holiday season. A majority have another job, including full-time work (33 percent) or part-time work (26 percent). For 26 percent of seasonal workers, their temporary employment is the only source of income, with one-fifth of those workers having been previously laid off this year.

The shift to seasonal, temporary, contract and other precarious forms of employment in the US is a basic feature of capitalism in the 21st century.

Workers at Amazon are exploited to their physical limits through computerized and AI-driven oversight and quotas. They are monitored by AI powered devices such as handheld productivity scanners, badges and cameras that track and time workers and penalize them for excessive “Time off Task,” which includes bathroom breaks.

This can result in disciplinary action, including automated termination. Quotas often involve handling hundreds of items an hour, with those unable to keep up with computerized minimums faced with discipline or firing.

Amazon drivers are monitored by a system called

Netradyne Driveri. This is a four-camera AI system that scrutinizes drivers for even the most minute alleged lapses of safety and efficiency, recording every moment of drive time and flagging drivers for deviating from a preset route or staying too long in any one area.

Amazon’s injury rate is much higher than the warehousing industry average. In 2021 Amazon was responsible for 49 percent of all injuries in the US warehousing industry, though Amazon workers made up 33 percent of the sector’s workforce. A 2023 study found 70 percent of Amazon workers surveyed reported having to take unpaid time off to recover from pain or exhaustion, with 40 percent of Amazon workers reporting to have been injured on the job.

Amazon’s regime of workplace injuries has been thoroughly documented by the *World Socialist Web Site*, beginning with the publication of an interview with former Texas Amazon worker Shannon Allen in 2018.

There has been a steady shift to online shopping, particularly among young people. Online sales are 16.3 percent of total US retail sales, up from 10.5 percent a decade ago. This process has accelerated this year with the integration of generative AI. Online customer traffic directed by AI chatbots has increased 1200 percent year-over-year.

Amazon’s revenue has grown six times over in the last ten years, from 107 billion dollars in 2015 to 638 billion dollars in 2024. This is due not only to a growth in online sales, but to Amazon’s emergence as a global mega-corporation with enormous logistical operations and dominance in other sectors. This includes its hugely profitable Amazon Web Services cloud computing business, which makes up 17 percent of its revenue but 58 percent of its operating income. AWS makes up one third of the world cloud-computing market.

**The US jobs massacre and AI layoffs**

Corporations like Amazon are utilizing artificial intelligence and automation to permanently eliminate vast numbers of jobs in every type of position. Layoffs by US companies this year are approaching 1.2 million, the highest level since the start of the pandemic and, before that, the Great Recession in 2008-2009.

Amazon plans to use automation to replace approximately 500,000 jobs over the next few years, which represents nearly half of its current US workforce. The company already announced layoffs for 14,000 corporate employees in late October as the company seeks to become “leaner” through the replacement of workers with generative AI.

Other corporations are imitating Amazon’s use of technology to replace workers. UPS is turning to automation to eliminate up to 80 percent of warehouse labor at 200 facilities and has already cut 48,000 jobs this year alone, including management and operations roles.

Amazon exploits workers all over the world to extract its enormous profits. It employs more than 100,000 people in India. In 2024 India’s human rights commission asked the government to look into a warehouse near New Delhi where thousands worked 10-hour shifts during a severe heatwave. In China, workers make around \$2 an hour working 60-hour weeks at FoxConn, contracted by Amazon to make devices like Alexa and Amazon Fire.

### **The obscenity of wealth: Jeff Bezos**

Jeff Bezos, the largest individual shareholder of Amazon, has seen his wealth climb to unimaginable heights. His fortune is estimated at between \$234 billion and \$254 billion; his wealth has ballooned 2,658 percent since 2007, despite splitting his wealth in a divorce with his first wife in 2019.

Bezos and fellow tech oligarchs Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook) and Elon Musk (Tesla, SpaceX) own more wealth combined than all the wealth of the bottom 50 percent of Americans taken together.

Bezos benefited from government bailouts of the financial sector in 2008 and 2020 and in 2021 paid an effective tax rate of less than 1 percent, according to a ProPublica report.

He owns \$700 million in residential properties, including residences at a guarded fortress enclave alongside other ultra wealthy individuals and celebrities known as the “Billionaire Bunker” on Indian Creek Island in Florida. In 2023–2024 Bezos spent about \$237 million on three mansions on the manmade island and is investing heavily in landscaping to create a private botanical garden.

His possessions include the \$500 million sailing yacht Koru—the largest of its kind—which features a figurehead resembling his wife, Lauren Sánchez. Koru requires the \$75 million support vessel Abeona and costs an estimated \$25 million annually to operate. Bezos reportedly owns a fleet of four private jets, valued at approximately \$200 million, including an \$80 million Gulfstream G700.

Bezos attended Trump’s inauguration in January with his wife and other oligarchs, showing his support for a presidential dictatorship that is gutting social programs and eviscerating democratic rights.

Amazon’s vast logistics, data center and cloud infrastructure concentrates immense productive power and unites the labor of millions of workers worldwide but cages these technological and industrial developments into a malevolent private profit framework. Under capitalism, an infinitesimal minority reap unimaginable wealth while the vast majority of the population sees a decline in living standards and hyper exploitation.

The drive to automate and “accelerate AI” has been used to justify mass layoffs and intensified surveillance, instead of being harnessed for social benefit. Under capitalism, these technologies are monetized for the oligarchy, fueling a speculative AI boom that threatens jobs, economies and democratic rights.

Only the democratic expropriation of the assets of Amazon and other large corporations and their conversion into publicly owned, transparently governed utilities can redirect technological and coordinated world labor power to shorten the working week, guarantee employment and meet social needs for all.

This requires independent, rank-and-file organization at Amazon warehouses and facilities and an international political strategy. Workers must build workplace committees, link them across sectors and borders through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-file Committees (IWA-RFC), to fight against oligarchy and inequality. Fill out the form below to be contacted about building a rank-and-file committee at your workforce.

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**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**