

# ICE abduction of 2 Amazon Flex drivers reveals the exploitative nature of the app-based gig economy labor model

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The February 2 Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid at an Amazon facility in Hazel Park, Michigan, aroused widespread anger and alarm among workers in the Detroit area.

The ICE raid was conducted in full view of Amazon workers at the Hazel Park facility, resulting in the arrest of two Venezuelan men—Edwin Vladimir Romero Gutierrez and Angel Junior Rincon Perez—who are now imprisoned at the North Lake Correctional Facility in Baldwin, Michigan.

Romero Gutierrez and Rincon Perez were both reporting to work when they were seized and abducted by ICE agents.

The assault on immigrants is the tip of the spear in the Trump administration's attempts to destroy whatever is left of democratic rule and establish himself as a dictator.

The ongoing ICE rampage in Minneapolis and across the country has made it clear that this terror operation is not only aimed at the immigrant community but at the working class as a whole, native- and foreign-born alike.

The targeting of Amazon Flex drivers in particular is especially significant, due to the fact that a considerable number of gig workers are immigrants who take on these highly exploitative positions when they are faced with no other means of employment.

## Contract workers denied protections

Amazon has been the largest online retailer in the US for more than a decade and is on course to overtake Walmart as the country's top retailer and logistics company.

In order to achieve market dominance, Amazon has utilized subcontracted last-mile delivery workers to increase its profits. This has come at the expense of the highly exploited workers employed on Amazon's Uber-like delivery platform, called "Amazon Flex."

Unveiled in 2015, the Amazon Flex model is now in use in over 260 metropolitan areas across all 50 US states, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. It also operated in Australia, Canada, India, Japan, Singapore and the United Kingdom as of April 2025.

When Amazon first appeared as an online bookseller in 1994, the company relied first on the U.S. Postal Service and later on UPS and FedEx to deliver merchandise, with contracts with UPS responsible for two-thirds of its deliveries by the time Amazon Flex was unveiled in 2015.

In 2016, Amazon was responsible for 10 percent of all last-mile deliveries, but that surged to two-thirds by 2020, eclipsing and ultimately replacing much of its reliance on FedEx and UPS.

While still utilizing the services of the U.S. Postal Service, Amazon heavily relies on the Amazon Flex model to expand its services and increase profits at the expense of a highly exploited workforce.

According to Amazon, "Flex is at the forefront of delivery operations, owning a significant piece of Amazon's 'Last Mile' delivery strategy at present and into the future."

Amazon intentionally misclassifies these workers as self-employed "independent contractors" in order to extract the maximum amount of surplus value from its workforce and minimize its legal and fiscal responsibilities by transferring economic risk and business costs onto the workers themselves.

According to the official Amazon Flex website, "Most drivers earn \$18–\$25 an hour delivering with Amazon Flex. Actual earnings will depend on your location, any tips you receive, how long it takes you to complete your deliveries, and other factors." [emphasis added]

However, through the Amazon Flex labor model, where workers are deemed "independent contractors," all legal and financial liability falls onto the workers themselves. Business expenses such as cars, gas, tolls, maintenance, insurance, work phones, cellular service and other equipment are deducted from the overall pay of the worker.

When an Amazon Flex driver experiences a car breakdown, a broken phone or an injury on the job, the workers themselves must foot the bill.

According to a Human Rights Watch survey, gig workers in Texas earn an average of \$5.12 an hour—approximately 70 percent below a living wage—after taking into account the costs associated with gas, maintenance, insurance, and unforeseen repairs such as flat tires or broken windows.

It is common for gig workers to report making less than their city's or state's legally mandated minimum wage and often being forced to choose between paying for either rent or food at the end of the month.

Workers classified as "independent contractors" lack fundamental protections such as minimum wage, overtime pay, paid sick or family leave, guaranteed work schedules, health insurance, workers' compensation, reimbursement of certain work-related expenses, workplace discrimination and sexual harassment protections and more.

Requiring Amazon Flex drivers to agree to mandatory arbitration and sign class action waivers as a precondition for work—often without the workers' knowledge—ensures that the predatory practices of

Amazon remain out of reach of the law and public scrutiny.

Mandatory arbitration clauses prevent workers from filing legal claims or lawsuits in public courts. Instead, their claims of mistreatment are resolved privately between the workers and arbitrators.

Class action waivers bar workers from joining together in a class action lawsuit against their employer, preventing legal settlements that can cover an entire workforce and blocking legal precedents that could be used to develop pro-worker case law.

The Amazon Flex labor model has been widely implemented across the industry, including logistics firms such as FedEx and UPS, as well as other professions such as nursing and education.

## Immigrants: a key section of the US workforce

According to data from a 2023 Pew Research Center study, nearly one in five workers (19 percent) in the US are immigrants.

Additional data from the Pew Research Center and consulting firm McKinsey & Company reveal that 45 percent of those working in the gig economy are immigrants, with the Independent Drivers Guild reporting that up to 90 percent of gig workers in New York are immigrants.

While estimates vary, it is believed that between 3.5 and 4.5 million immigrants are employed in app-based work such as Uber, DoorDash, Lyft, GrubHub, Instacart or Amazon Flex.

The inability to qualify for a Social Security Number (SSN) or Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) places immigrants in a precarious position, forcing them to seek work “under the table” or within the highly exploitative gig economy.

The difficult legal and financial situation that immigrants confront creates conditions in which multibillion-dollar corporations can more readily exploit immigrant workers through precarious forms of employment.

Much like immigrant workers informally employed in construction, agriculture or hospitality, gig workers face unstable working conditions, low wages, demanding schedules, financial and legal liability and the risk of detention by immigration agents.

The terrorizing of the most vulnerable and highly exploited sections of the working class by the Trump administration through ICE raids is a brutal form of labor discipline and intimidation. Needless to say, it has the full backing of the financial oligarchy, including Amazon co-founder and billionaire Jeff Bezos.

## The Bezos-Amazon-Trump connection

For his part, Bezos—Amazon’s largest individual shareholder and the world’s fourth richest person—is part of Trump’s inner circle and is actively participating in the ruling elite’s attempt to establish Trump as president/dictator.

As early as 2022, the Department of Defense awarded Amazon Web Services (AWS), the cloud computing arm of Amazon, a multibillion-dollar cloud computing contract alongside Microsoft, Google and Oracle to provide services across all classification levels and military

branches.

Amazon’s AWS also has extensive contracts with other federal agencies and defense contractors, most notably the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees ICE operations across the US, and Project Nimbus, which provides the Israeli government with large datasets on the population within Gaza and the occupied territories.

Both of these services rendered by AWS have ensured that the actions of the Israeli and US governments continue with efficiency and operational effectiveness.

These technological capabilities could be used to improve life for the vast majority of the world’s population. However, under the private control and ownership of corporations such as Amazon and figures such as Jeff Bezos, these technologies are being used to support war abroad and repression at home.

The open embrace and support of these policies by Amazon have provoked a determined response from sections of the working class in defense of democratic rights.

On February 13, less than two weeks after the ICE detention of Romero Gutierrez and Rincon Perez, over 200 Amazon workers and local activist groups assembled in front of Amazon’s corporate headquarters in Seattle, Washington, to demand that Amazon cut ties with ICE and defense companies such as Palantir.

This protest comes amid a wave of high school walkouts opposing ICE operations and coincides with strike activity across the country involving healthcare workers, teachers, academic workers and oil refinery workers.

However, the organizers of the protest in Seattle oriented their efforts toward pressuring sections of the financial oligarchy.

Evan Sutton, one of the organizers, told the news website *Common Dreams* that Amazon’s collaboration with Trump’s apparatus “was a mistake” and that workers must apply pressure on the company to abandon support for ICE.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) warns that such appeals will fall on deaf ears. The financial oligarchs will not be persuaded by moral appeals to abandon their class interests.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* previously reported:

The intensified targeting of workers—particularly Amazon Flex drivers—is not an accident. Amazon and other logistics companies are integrated into ICE operations through data sharing, surveillance infrastructure and the use of third-party delivery services that include large numbers of immigrant and undocumented workers.

What is needed to stop ICE and Trump’s plans for dictatorship is for Amazon workers to turn to broader sections of the working class and assist in forming rank-and-file committees in workplaces, neighborhoods and schools in a unified struggle against repression, inequality and dictatorship.

The formation of these committees must also include highly exploited Amazon Flex drivers, native- and foreign-born alike, in a struggle to challenge the power of the financial oligarchy, of which Trump and Bezos are central figures.



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