"Workers need to organize for a mass general strike"—an Amazon worker in Massachusetts speaks out on exploitation, surveillance and organizing the fight back

Kate Randall
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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 private employer in the United States, has constructed an elaborate system designed to extract maximum productivity from its workforce while insulating the corporation from legal accountability to the workers who generate its profits. A core element of this system is the Delivery Service Partner (DSP) program—a sprawling network of nominally independent subcontractors through which Amazon controls the lives of hundreds of thousands of delivery drivers without, it claims, employing a single one of them.

The *World Socialist Web Site* recently spoke with Manny, who has been a part-time worker in Amazon's Delivery Service Partner (DSP) program in Massachusetts for five years. He also works the afternoon shift at a manufacturing company and is a student as well.

His account lays bare the grueling physical demands, relentless surveillance and calculated division of workers that define life inside Amazon's delivery operation.

What is a DSP?

Amazon launched its DSP program in 2018. As of early 2024, the company counted some 3,500 to 4,400 DSP companies operating across 19 countries, employing an estimated 275,000 to 390,000 drivers and delivering more than 20 million packages daily. Amazon markets the arrangement as an opportunity for "entrepreneurs" to build thriving small businesses, but the reality—as workers across the country can attest—is something far less glamorous.

Manny described the structure: "A DSP is a driver associate program, where Amazon pays people to do last-minute driver delivery service for them. It's a system where they use Amazon branded vehicles, such as the smaller sprinter vans and the large CDL [commercial driver's license] vans, and where we have to deliver packages as if we were part of Amazon."

The critical distinction, he explained, lies in who bears the costs and who holds the power. The DSP operates Amazon-branded vehicles, enforces Amazon rules, and manages Amazon's delivery routes—yet is responsible for vehicle maintenance, workers' compensation and health insurance out of its own pocket. "Amazon may subsidize repair," Manny said, "but the responsibility of upkeep and maintenance mainly falls on the DSP contractor."

The National Labor Relations Board has found in at least one case that Amazon functions as a joint employer of DSP drivers, given that the company determines daily routes, sets delivery deadlines, dictates pay structures and communicates directly with drivers through its own app. Amazon has contested this determination and continues to insist the drivers are not its employees.

"Amazon determines all the rules and enforces them through the DSP," Manny said, "but they never pay for any of the cost in terms of maintenance, workers' compensation, health insurance and stuff like that." When asked who ultimately controls the operation, he was unequivocal: "Amazon holds all the decisions."

A day in the life

On a typical workday, Manny wakes at 9 a.m., does course work, drives to school, then drives back to work at his "other job" for an eight-hour shift before returning home to do homework. He repeats this schedule until Friday, then works part-time at Amazon on the weekends.

That a young worker is compelled to balance education with two jobs, including a physically demanding delivery job—just to make ends meet—is itself an indictment of the economic conditions facing millions of workers and young people in the US today.

At the warehouse, the shift begins with a ritual of digital control. "Around 10:30 a.m. we show up and we are distributed our phones and keys and credit cards," Manny explained. "We log on to the Amazon Flex app. The initial step is we have to take a selfie, and then now, if we're registered, it will proceed to the next step, where we have to do a 90-second inspection of the vehicle."

The inspection, he noted, is largely perfunctory: "We're just told to wait 90 seconds before, you know, just flipping through it." Drivers are then given 20 minutes at the "Launch Pad"—the loading area within the Amazon facility—to fill their vans with packages for delivery before heading out.

Amazon drivers are monitored by a four-camera AI system that scrutinizes them 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 remaining too long in any one area. Manny confirmed the omnipresence of this surveillance: "The Amazon-branded vehicles have a camera that watches you all the time. It's on you all the time, which is very intrusive."

He recalled, "I've gotten docked because the camera saw as I was singing along to a song. And so, they said that was distracted driving. I got docked for that."

Pay, he explained, is dictated by Amazon, which operates on a piece rate system. Workers are paid the 10-hour flat rate, whether you work for more or less than 10 hours you are paid that rate. The hourly wage is approximately $23—a figure totally inadequate to account for the physical toll, the unpaid burdens and the grinding poverty that defines the job.

Quotas without limits, bodies without rest

Manny was direct about what makes the job most punishing: not any single hazard, but the sheer accumulation of demands within a fixed window of time. "Amazon really does not have a limit as to how many packages and stops that they give workers," he said. "Some workers have gotten 200 stops, or have to deliver 400 packages. I myself have had a point where the vans are essentially stuffed and where there is no path from the back, so you essentially have to use the front to organize and sort and deliver packages until you can work your way in to actually have some space."

Amazon's injury rate is dramatically higher than the warehousing industry average. A 2023 study found that 70 percent of Amazon workers surveyed reported having to take unpaid time off to recover from pain or exhaustion, and 40 percent reported having been injured on the job. For delivery drivers working at the pace Manny describes, injury is not a remote possibility—it is a statistical near-certainty over time.

The "rescue" system compounds the pressure. When a driver falls behind, a faster driver who has completed their own route is dispatched to absorb the remaining stops. "What was a 170-stop job turns into a 190-stop job because you have to take 20 stops for them in order for that person to finish," he said. "It feels like you've finished your work, and then you have to help someone out, so you can't go home yourself."

Then there are the obstacles that no algorithm can anticipate. Dog bites, Manny noted, are a routine occupational hazard: "There was one person who was bitten badly by a dog. Dog bites are not uncommon in this job. So much so that they say that if you see a dog in the yard, to mark it as incomplete and not to encounter it"—although you are still responsible for making the delivery. He himself has been bitten once and narrowly avoided worse encounters on multiple occasions.

Newer "password delivery" requirements add yet another layer of friction. Some stops require the driver to obtain a verbal confirmation code from the customer before leaving the package. "That means you have to directly interact with the customer in order to receive the password, just to deliver the package," Manny explained—all while the clock is running toward the shift-end cutoff of 8:30 or 9 p.m.

Amazon's mandated half-hour break exists on paper. In practice, its usefulness is limited by a prohibition on leaving the designated route. "We're not allowed to go off route and there aren't really any bathrooms," Manny said. "Sometimes we get lucky—if there was a construction site nearby, I would generally just use the porta potties, if they're around."

Winter conditions in Massachusetts and New Hampshire make an already strenuous job dangerous. "It gets darker quicker, so you're basically delivering packages mostly in the night, and it's generally hard to see houses, see hazards," Manny said. The holiday peak—Cyber Monday, Christmas—coincides precisely with the shortest days and most dangerous driving conditions.

"Amazon has made us work during snowstorms," he said. "Drivers end up getting stuck and have to be bailed out. I have gotten stuck myself during those two occasions. They recalled us halfway through our route as if that made up for sending us out during the snowstorm in the first place. This year was the first time Amazon actually cancelled routes, during the 2026 blizzard."

Threats related to property owners present an additional hazard that rarely makes corporate safety reports. "If you go to DSP drivers on the Reddit app, drivers post pictures of threatening gun signs. They're everywhere. They seem to be in every state. You have these belligerent rural customers, but it's in the suburbs too."

If a driver fails to complete their route within the allotted window, Amazon's response is punitive and immediate: "If you overstep the time limit, you will receive less days of work."

A workforce designed to be divided

Manny has worked in this system for five years—far longer than average. "An average driver there lasts for at least six months. I would say it's rare for anyone to last more than a couple years," he said. "This is essentially a pay-the-bills job. They just stick with it long enough in order to get out of whatever hole they're in, and then look for something better."

Amazon's turnover rate has been reported at approximately 150 percent annually—meaning the company churns through more workers each year than it actually employs at any given moment. High turnover is not a failure of Amazon's business model but a deliberate feature of it, used to suppress seniority, instill fear and keep labor costs down.

The DSP structure itself is a weapon of labor control. By fragmenting the workforce across thousands of nominally independent small businesses—each responsible for hiring, firing, paying and insuring its own drivers—Amazon diffuses the collective power that workers might otherwise build. In addition to this, there are Amazon Flex workers who make deliveries out of their personal vehicles, similar to Uber or other rideshare apps.

"The fact that they have Flex drivers, in addition to the DSP, it's all to keep us divided and from essentially organizing. Amazon has within their buildings posters saying why joining a union is bad, and that if you were to join a union, you have to pay the union bosses and everything—generally everything against social organizing. They were telling DSP owners to report if there was someone trying to unionize the DSP drivers. If the DSP drivers do get unionized, then Amazon will shut down the DSP. They've done that before."

In Palmdale, California, Amazon did precisely that: After 84 DSP delivery drivers voted to join the Teamsters in April 2023—the first group of Amazon delivery drivers in the country to unionize—Amazon terminated its contract with the DSP, effectively dismissing the entire unionized workforce.

The isolation built into the job reinforces the division. "You don't have much time to talk to people," Manny said. "It's very rapid and fast paced. It's just eight to 10 hours delivering packages."

"It's like a surveillance state"

When asked to connect his daily experience to the broader political situation facing the working class, Manny made the following comparison:

"With Amazon, it's pretty much a surveillance state," he said. "You're watched constantly all the time. Every little thing that you do serves as a

violation, and then it comes back later when they try to discipline you. Amazon will send an alert to the DSP, and then the DSP will chastise you for a violation. If you rack up too many violations, then you are taken off the road."

Workers at Amazon are exploited to their physical limits through computerized and AI-driven oversight. They are monitored by AI-powered devices—handheld scanners, badges, and cameras—that track and time workers and penalize them for excessive "Time off Task," against which Amazon's algorithms count even bathroom breaks.

Manny was also asked about a WSWS article reporting that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents had arrested Amazon workers in a facility in Michigan—hauling them away in front of their coworkers without warning. His response was pointed: "I think that was pretty egregious. It really shows the risk workers are taking doing these jobs. And you know, you deal with Amazon's rules and regulations, and then the next morning you come in, and you get arrested by some goons. And you're in a cell, who knows where—and Amazon doesn't have the fortitude to issue a statement or provide you a lawyer."

package handlers are more productive than the US Air Force. Our jobs don't involve sending bombs that cost $43 million to kill people who, like me, will never make that much money in their lifetime."

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges Amazon DSP drivers and all logistics workers to make contact with us to share your experiences and connect with workers across the industry who are fighting back against the same conditions. The building of rank-and-file committees, independent of the corporate-controlled union bureaucracies, is essential to transforming that fight into a conscious and coordinated movement of the entire working class.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

"Workers need to organize for a mass general strike"

Amazon's methods of surveillance, high turnover and subcontracting have become a template for corporate America as a whole. The use of such techniques is now referred to in boardrooms as "Amazonization." Meanwhile, Jeff Bezos, Amazon's founder and largest individual shareholder, has accumulated a fortune estimated between $234 billion and $254 billion—wealth that has ballooned by thousands of percent over the past two decades on the backs of its workers.

"Workers need to organize for a mass general strike," Manny said. "Clearly, the company doesn't have your back. I doubt your job will be waiting for you afterwards. So, I would say that workers, despite the risks from Amazon and other companies trying to keep us stratified, we need to organize and have a planned system for a general strike—gathering resources, linking up with workers at other companies and setting a timetable for an indefinite general strike that will essentially grind this country to a halt. Because that's the only thing that would stop them."

We discussed the campaign of Will Lehman, who is running for president of the United Auto Workers. "I watched the WSWS interview of Will Lehman and I would encourage others reading this to do the same," Manny said. "His experiences at Mack Trucks in Pennsylvania and the betrayal of the New River Valley autoworkers has shown the importance that it is not just enough to organize; that the structure and political orientation of the union are just as important.

"I would hate to imagine if Amazon workers formed a union in similar structure to the UAW. It would be one step forward and two steps back. Amazon workers should organize in the form of rank-and-file committees and stay clear of unions like the UAW. I also liked his emphasis on the international character of the working class and companies like Amazon. Amazon hates to lose, and will use their international character to suppress workers. So, we have to be internationalist in order to beat them."

In light of the Trump administration's war against Iran, Manny commented on the role of Amazon as a military contractor, particularly its $581 million data center contract for the Air Force:

"This seems more like an excuse for the US government to give $581 million to Amazon. Amazon isn't really a tech company, or a civil engineering company, and they don't advertise about how they build data centers, and it was a no-bid contract, too. None of the workers who work for Amazon will see even a dime of that contract money. We drivers and