

Thousands of US Amazon workers on verge of holiday season strike

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*Amazon workers: Tell us what you're fighting for!
All submissions will be kept anonymous.*

Thousands of Amazon workers in New York and Illinois could strike as soon as Thursday. They include more than 5,500 workers at the JFK8 fulfillment center in Staten Island, New York, hundreds of delivery drivers at the DBK4 last-mile delivery station in Queens, New York, and 100 drivers at the DIL7 delivery station in Skokie, Illinois. The workers are demanding that Amazon recognize their union and negotiate contracts with them.

All the workers involved are members of the Teamsters. The workers at JFK8 voted to join the Amazon Labor Union (ALU) in 2022, and that organization joined the Teamsters this June. The DIL7 drivers joined the Teamsters in August, and the DBK4 drivers in September. The drivers officially work for Amazon's delivery service partners, which are subcontractors that Amazon hires to avoid responsibility for meeting workplace regulations, even as it maintains control over wages and working conditions.

The overwhelming strike votes at these three facilities demonstrate the widespread opposition to Amazon's notorious regime of brutal exploitation and dangerous working conditions. Moreover, they are up against one of the most powerful corporations on the planet, with tendrils in every area of the world. "Amazonification" has become a buzzword in corporate boardrooms meaning the use of automation and artificial intelligence to carry out mass layoffs and work those remaining to the bone.

There is enormous potential for a global movement uniting Amazon workers. On Black Friday, workers in 20 countries took part in protests against the online retailer. Workers at a warehouse in Coventry in Britain

have also struck multiple times. This is part of a broader upsurge, which also includes postal workers across the world. More than 50,000 Canada Post workers struck for a month until the government banned their strike earlier this week.

Chairman and founder Jeff Bezos, worth over \$250 billion, is one of the most hated oligarchs in America. Since the November election, he has expressed his support for Donald Trump, especially his incoming administration's plans to slash social spending and corporate regulations.

A recent investigation by the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions provided a glimpse of the grueling conditions under which Amazon workers labor. It confirmed previous findings that injury rates at Amazon are more than 1.8 times those of other companies within the industry. These injury rates result from the company's enforcement of inhuman productivity quotas.

Amazon's own recent study indicates that injury rates increase significantly when workers perform the equivalent of picking more than 216 items per hour during a 10-hour shift. Attempting to meet the productivity quotas, workers usually pick more than 266 items per hour. Yet the company refused to accept its internal investigators' recommendations for giving workers more time off and suspending disciplinary measures for workers who do not meet the productivity quotas. Its sole concern is to extract the most profit possible from workers' labor, regardless of the cost to workers' health.

But these workers should be under no illusion that the Teamsters, which is helping to carry out mass layoffs at UPS, will lead a serious fight to win their demands. The Teamsters officialdom's goals in establishing a presence at Amazon are to expand its base of dues-

paying members and to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with the company. Carrying forward a determined fight will require Amazon workers to wrest the initiative from these bureaucrats by organizing rank-and-file strike committees.

The Teamsters had given Amazon until December 15 to recognize the union and begin bargaining or face a strike. The walkout would occur as the company pushes workers even harder to meet customer demand during the holiday season. A strike during this period could inflict significant financial pain on the company.

On a conference call with every local, Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien announced that the strike would begin at 6:00 a.m. on Thursday, December 19, and end on Saturday, December 21. Every local is expected to picket the Amazon facilities in their areas and to block UPS feeder drivers from crossing the picket lines to pick up their packages.

The decision to limit the strike in advance is an indication that the union's aim is to vent workers' anger while bolstering the bureaucracy's credibility rather than inflict a serious blow to the company.

Despite O'Brien's conference call with all Teamsters locals, it is not a given that he will call a strike on Thursday. Last summer, O'Brien spent months shouting that 340,000 UPS workers would strike if the company did not reach a satisfactory agreement with them before their contract expired. But instead of calling a strike, O'Brien kept workers on the job while the Teamsters apparatus finalized the details on what they later presented as the best in the company's history.

Combining a public relations campaign with intimidation tactics, the bureaucracy coerced workers into ratifying a contract that is now being used to shutter at least 200 facilities and use automation to destroy jobs. UPS executives later boasted that the contract provided "labor certainty" and curbed cost increases.

O'Brien and the Teamsters are, like Bezos, also a top ally of Trump, with O'Brien meeting several times with the fascist demagogue this year and speaking at the Republican National Convention. Last week, O'Brien endorsed one of Trump's "America First" tirades, in which he tried to pin the blame for automation of US ports on "foreign" corporations. Trump, as with O'Brien and the Teamsters, uses this

rhetoric to divide workers of different nationalities against each other and deflect the responsibility of US corporations in carrying out mass layoffs.

A real fight requires an indefinite strike involving workers across the United States and around the world. Workers at Amazon must make their fight the tip of the spear of a broad counteroffensive in defense of jobs and working conditions everywhere.

The Teamsters has also been directing workers to scab on the ongoing strike of 55,000 Canada Post workers. When the strike began, union leaders stoutly proclaimed their solidarity with the striking workers and vowed that their members at Purolator, a subsidiary of Canada Post, would not be used to break the strike.

But when Purolator, under the direction of Canada Post, imposed overtime on its employees so that they could perform the work that would otherwise have been disrupted by the strike, Teamsters officials did nothing. These bureaucrats have not only softened the blow against Canada Post but also smoothed the way for the Canadian government's current attempt to break the strike by ordering workers back to their jobs.

A genuine struggle against Amazon can only be initiated and controlled by the workers themselves, not the treacherous bureaucrats. Workers can assert their control by establishing rank-and-file committees at every Amazon facility. These committees must be independent of the Teamsters and run democratically by the workers.

Instead of trusting O'Brien and his cohort, Amazon workers, through their committees, must develop their own strategy to fight for control over line speed, better pay, better benefits and other objective needs. An essential part of this strategy must be to reach out to other logistics workers, both in the United States and abroad.



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