

Workers in Staten Island, New York, join Amazon strike

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On Saturday morning, workers at Amazon's JFK8 fulfillment center in Staten Island, New York, joined the significant strike against the company that began on Thursday. The JFK8 workers are demanding that Amazon recognize their union and begin negotiating a contract with them.

More than 5,500 workers at JFK8 belong to the Amazon Labor Union (ALU), which affiliated itself with the Teamsters in June. Since the JFK8 workers voted to join the ALU more than two-and-a-half years ago, Amazon has refused to recognize or negotiate with the union. Earlier this month, after the workers voted to strike, the Teamsters announced that if Amazon did not begin negotiating by December 15 workers would walk out.

Amazon is a massive retailer, digital streaming and cloud computing company with operations around the world. In 2023, the company reported revenue of \$574.8 billion. The company's founder, Jeff Bezos, is one of the world's richest men, with a net worth of about \$200 billion. These phenomenal sums have been accumulated through the relentless exploitation of the company's workforce.

Amazon has led the way in deploying automation, surveillance technology and artificial intelligence to monitor workers at every moment and push them beyond the level of human endurance. A recent study by the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions found that injury rates at Amazon are more than 1.8 times those of other companies within the industry. Bezos has publicly proclaimed his willingness to work with President-elect Donald Trump to roll back the minimal regulations that are in place.

On Thursday, thousands of workers began striking at the DBK4 distribution center in New York; DGT8 in Atlanta; the DFX4, DAX5 and DAX8 facilities in

southern California; DCK6 in San Francisco; and the DIL7 delivery station in Skokie, Illinois. Most of these workers are drivers who work for Amazon's delivery service partners (DSPs). Though they are not Amazon employees, the company maintains strict control over their wages, hours and working conditions.

"I want things to be better going forward to the future," a driver who was picketing at the DBK4 facility in New York told the *World Socialist Web Site*. He spoke under condition of anonymity. "Things need to be better for young people coming into work: to get paid better. Some people have their job as a career. I want \$1,300 or \$1,500 a week. Now I get \$600 a week. We work in worse conditions than this cold now. We work in extreme heat and extreme cold. We do 200 houses in eight hours."

Another driver described how hiring subcontractors is advantageous not only to Amazon, but also to the DSPs. "Everybody gets plausible deniability," he said. "The DSP can say, 'No, no, that's Amazon that doesn't want to pay you time and a half.' And [Amazon] can say, 'No, it's your company that doesn't want to pay you time and a half.'" Hiring several subcontractors also allows Amazon to try to keep workers separated and prevent them from waging a united fight.

That same driver told WSWs reporters, "We don't get holiday pay. We don't get overtime. I don't get a guaranteed 40 hours (a week)."

He added, "I'm told calling out before, during or the day after a holiday is considered a resignation."

On Thursday, Amazon undertook a coordinated effort to intimidate JFK8 workers, even before they began to strike. The company installed new fences around the warehouse and posted guards at every entrance. Several police cars were parked on the street in front of JFK8,

and others patrolled the area. At one point, a group of as many as 20 officers milled around in the street. This mobilization was an unmistakable show of force.

The JFK8 workers voted to join the ALU in April 2022 because they believed that it was a fighting organization through which they could win their demands. The ALU presented itself as a democratic organization that was distinct from the established trade unions, which have discredited themselves through decades of sellout contracts. But almost immediately after winning the election at JFK8, the ALU turned to the very trade unions that they had criticized, including the Teamsters.

During the following two years, the ALU demonstrated that it had no strategy for fighting Amazon. Instead of holding meetings, formulating demands and organizing a strike, the ALU encouraged workers to appeal to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The NLRB's mission, however, is not to defend workers, but to protect the profit interests of the corporations. Its record comprises pro-company settlements and the occasional pro forma penalty that fails to discourage management from violating workers' rights. Even when the NLRB ruled in favor of the JFK8 workers, Amazon refused to abide by the ruling, and it has done so with impunity.

The ALU has also presented the Democratic Party as a defender of workers. But for the past two years, the Democrats' overriding priorities have been to escalate the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and to support Israel as it commits genocide against the Palestinians. No less than the Republicans, the Democrats represent the interests of Wall Street. Both parties intend to fund imperialist war abroad, which threatens to become a nuclear apocalypse, through massive social cuts and attacks on the working class at home.

Beset by internal disputes and running out of funds, the ALU leadership turned to the Teamsters to rescue them earlier this year. The result was the affiliation of the ALU with the latter union, which has a long history of corruption and corporatism.

Though the Teamsters called the current strike, the main goal of the union's leadership is to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with Amazon management. The Teamsters bureaucrats also hope to bolster their tattered credibility after a series of betrayals. This month, the union allowed workers at

Canadian courier company Purolator to scab on the strike of Canada Post workers, thus enabling Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to legalize the strike and send workers back to their jobs. Last year, the Teamsters blocked a strike at UPS and imposed a contract that is allowing the company to close at least 200 facilities and to cut jobs through automation.

For their powerful strike to be victorious, the thousands of Amazon workers on the picket lines must take the initiative away from the Teamsters. The workers themselves must control this struggle democratically by forming rank-and-file committees outside the control of the union and independent of the capitalist parties. The strike must be expanded not only to all Amazon facilities, but also to other logistics workers and workers in other industries, all of whom are facing similar attacks. Underneath the workplace issues are the fundamental questions of capitalist exploitation and the political system that upholds it.



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