

Opinion Amazon

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Amazon workers are rising up around the world to say: enough

Valter Sanches, Christy Hoffman and Casper Gelderblom

Amazon's global infrastructure is held together by exploitation of those who operate it. And workers are pushing back

Wed 26 May 2021 06:19 EDT

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'Amazon is responsible for what happens in the worksites that make up its global empire - and must be held accountable in and across all its regions.' Photograph: Lev Radin/Pacific Press/Rex/Shutterstock



mazon, the world's most powerful corporation, is an iceberg. Users and consumers see its top: the shops, the streaming service, the packages. But below the surface lies an enormous infrastructure

L Amazon's global infrastructure, stretching across continents, linking production, distribution and delivery. A complex transnational system, populated by workers around the world whose labor drives Amazon's profits.

Its chief executive and founder, Jeff Bezos, the world's richest man, tries to conceal this system with the comfort and entertainment his services offer. The reason is equally clear and outrageous. From the factories where the products it sells are made, to the doorsteps where they are delivered, Amazon's global infrastructure is held together by the exploitation of those who operate it.

Throughout Amazon's supply chain, Bezos's behemoth violates workers' safety, dignity and privacy, putting them to work in worksites designed to squeeze as much labor out of them for as little money as possible. Workers do not take this lying down. Supported by a myriad of progressive allies, there is labor resistance all over Amazon's global map, with strikes and protests from Spain to São Paulo, from Delhi to Berlin. On Black Friday last year, as scrutiny over [Amazon's anti-union practices](#), [environmental impact](#), [tax avoidance](#) and [worker safety](#) intensified in [Europe](#) and the [United States](#), UNI Global Union, IndustriaALL, [Progressive International](#), Oxfam, Greenpeace and dozens of civil society organizations, environmentalists and tax watchdogs organized protest actions in 12 countries, uniting under the banner of Make Amazon Pay.

Aided by shocking media reports about [dangerous](#) and even [dehumanizing](#) working conditions, this activism draws attention to Amazon's treatment of the warehouse workers who stow, store and sort its signature packages. As a result, the corporation's efforts to conceal its conduct in this part of its global empire are faltering. In the UK, where most Amazon workers are employed in the corporation's so-called "Fulfillment Centers", a poll late last year found that only 24% of respondents [believed](#) Amazon treated its workers fairly. In the US, where Amazon recently worked to undermine a union campaign in Alabama with tactics that union leaders say [prevented a free and fair election](#) and violated federal law, almost 80% of respondents [supported](#) the warehouse workers' struggle.

In the delivery part of Amazon's empire, too, workers resist Amazon's mistreatment. Delivery workers in India recently [struck](#) in Bengaluru, Delhi, Hyderabad and Pune, demanding better pay and employee benefits. During a [ground-breaking national strike](#) in Italy, 75% of all Amazon workers in the country stopped work, bringing together warehouse and delivery workers in an inspiring example of cross-supply chain solidarity. Recently, the shockingly common outrage of workers having to pee in bottles due to a lack of adequate break time [went viral](#), bringing delivery workers into the fold of a common front taking on Amazon, and helping expand the public's conception of Amazon's workforce.

However, a crucial part of Amazon's global infrastructure remains largely concealed. The self-styled Everything Store does not just sell, store and ship products - it also directly sources them. The corporation [owns](#) more than 400 private-label brands, selling a wide range of products from garments to electronics. From its Kindle e-readers to its rising apparel empire, Amazon is now the [top fashion retailer](#) in the United States - Amazon's brands draw on an extensive network of some [1,400 factories](#) worldwide.

Amazon is responsible for what happens in the worksites that make up its global empire - and must be Located mostly in countries in the global south, workers in these factories typically work in dire conditions. In Chinese factories producing Amazon devices like Echo and

held accountable in and across all its regions

Alexa, [investigations](#) have revealed numerous illegal practices, from endless night shifts to underpayment. Last year, the absence of adequate health and safety measures in a [Guatemala factory](#) producing garments for Amazon brands saw a major Covid outbreak, endangering the lives of hundreds of workers. As a recent [report](#) by the Worker Rights Consortium revealed, Amazon is among a number of powerful multinationals refusing to make sure factory workers laid off during the pandemic get the severance pay they are still owed.

Amazon is responsible for what happens in the worksites that make up its global empire - and must be held accountable in and across all its regions. Workers themselves are at the forefront of the struggle to make this happen. Like warehouse and delivery workers, factory workers in the last concealed part of Amazon's global system of exploitation are taking on the corporation. Unionized garment workers who lost their jobs in October when Amazon's supplier [Global Garments](#) closed are demanding the factory reopen, rehire the 1,200 union members and provide them with back pay. In Cambodia, former workers at Amazon's supplier [Hulu Garment](#) are calling on Amazon to ensure their full legally owed severance.

Workers across Amazon's supply chain share the same struggle. Winning it requires them to come together in solidarity and leverage their collective power. In November, factory workers in Bangladesh joined protesting warehouse workers in many countries and supporters from the public during the planetary mobilization on Black Friday. On Wednesday, workers from the Hulu Garment factory in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and Global Garments factory in Chittagong, Bangladesh, lead a global day of action to make Amazon pay all its workers.

Amazon must pay all its workers - wherever they reside, whatever their occupation. And, ultimately, making Amazon pay is part of a much bigger fight to win another world. One in which global commercial circuits are geared not towards the wealth and power of billionaires and shareholders, but towards the health and happiness of the hard-working people who run it.

- Valter Sanches general secretary of IndustriALL Global Union
- Christy Hoffman, general secretary of UNI Global Union
- Casper Gelderblom, Make Amazon Pay coordinator for The Progressive International


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