

Wildcat strike at Amazon



A report of the recent wildcat strikes currently sweeping through Amazon warehouses in Britain, from a worker on the shopfloor.

After continuing problems, on Wednesday 3rd August Amazon told us that they are going to increase the pay rate by only 35p an hour. In response, many of us stopped working on Wednesday afternoon. We hadn't planned to walk out beforehand, but the news of the 35p pay rise encouraged many people to do something. I think people in every department joined, with at least 200 workers involved.

After we stopped working, they told us to go to the largest room in the fulfilment centre, in order to have a proper conversation. When we got there, all of our managers were looking at us all. None of them had a clue about what to do with a large group of angry workers. They presented themselves as being completely ignorant about the situation. Without coming back with any explanation or empathy, they told everyone "if you are not gonna go back to the work, you're not gonna be paid!"

They lost their temper with us, and had no idea how to speak to us and try to end our strike. The next shift - the night shift - joined us with a massive strike.

The next morning on Thursday, everyone was still mad about the 35p offer. We therefore decided to strike again from 8am until we got an answer. Soon after we started striking, the GM came over to tell us that it is perfectly fine to protest, but that we were not going to be paid for staying in the fulfilment centre without working. They then told us anyone who did not go back to work was going to be automatically clocked out at 08:30. Still, the majority of us stayed in the canteen where we were striking. Management's threat scared some people into going back to work, as they couldn't afford to lose any pay.

After many hours the GM came back and told us they were going to speak with everyone that was protesting and striking. After the first three conversations they had, they told us they were going to have a phone call with the head officer director to tell them

the situation and what was going to happen next.

After three hours, they still hadn't gotten back to us. However, the Amazon work app, we were still logged as being at work, meaning the GM had not actually clocked us out like they had threatened to. We decided to go to the GMs office and demand to talk, but they told us that it was "not safe to have a conversation in here."

After the march to the office, HR came out again to invite eight more people to a 'round table.' This of course led to nothing, with the GM again being almost silent, not knowing what to say to us. These eight workers spoke to them about the many problems at the fulfilment centre. They explained that even when we accept everything, meet our targets, and work extra hard on prime days, we are still treated poorly. They told them that when we have a problem, we cannot even speak with a manager, because they are



always very rude. And on top of all this, we have only received a 35p pay rise, which is a joke. There is a trade union with some members on the site, but it hasn't really been involved in these negotiations because Amazon won't allow them to do so.

After all this, we had lost 10 hours of work, sitting in the canteen waiting for an answer. At the end of the day, the GM told us that they will give us an answer in a week's time. However, they said they still couldn't even be sure if this would be the final answer.

As of Friday, we are no longer fully striking. However, we have decided that we will not try and reach any targets, and instead try and make our job easier by working at a more relaxed pace.

If people want to support our struggle, they can join any protests happening near our warehouses.

How the Amazon wildcat spread

In this report, a worker in Coventry tells us how they joined the current wave of wildcat strikes sweeping through Amazon warehouses in Britain.

We worked through the entire Covid pandemic, including the lockdowns. We've been waiting for information about this pay rise since April with everyone expecting at least £2 extra per hour. However, management announced on Wednesday that we were only going to get a 50p rise per hour.

We only planned to go on strike two hours before it actually happened. We had seen the strikes at Tilbury and Rugeley fulfilment centres on TikTok during our break time, and it inspired us to strike. We watched those videos at 11am, and started spreading the idea of a walkout through word of mouth around the warehouse. By 1pm, we had over 300 people who walked out and stopped working. At the beginning, we had no help with the strikes from any trade unions. We organised it all ourselves. However, after we walked out, GMB made some contact with us about joining the union and giving us advice.

When we walked out again on Thursday, the GM (General Manager) came into the canteen area, where those of us refusing to work had congregated. The GM told us we had 30 minutes to come up with our reasoning for refusing to work and send someone over to discuss the strike with them. We refused to send only one person, as we all agreed that we wanted to go as one team.



We told the GM that we demand a better pay rise, asked them questions about our pay, and how they had come up with this 50p per hour rise. We were then told later that they would "take it away and try to get an answer." After this, the managers said we wouldn't get paid unless we returned to work. But everyone stayed, still refusing to go back to work.

On Friday morning, again about 100 associates walked out and protested outside.

Our struggle is far from over. We have more collective action planned for the following days, as we keep fighting for a proper pay rise.

Social distancing and alienation

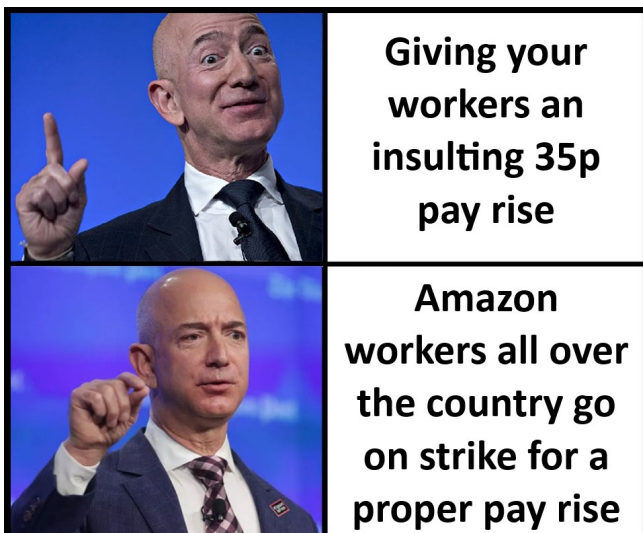
An extract written by an Amazon worker in Scotland during the pandemic.

I hear Amazon promote how great and generous and benevolent they are, giving "all" workers bonuses during the pandemic. I do not think I know a single agency worker who ever got a bonus before Christmas, and many have still not been paid properly. An increase of 20 pence in hourly pay was the only pre-Christmas 'bonus' we received – and this hardly counts for much when shifts are frequently cancelled. I hear reports in the media of Amazon stealing tens of millions of dollars from their drivers in the US, how in Scotland their

warehouses have been publicly funded by the taxpayer, and yet they evade paying tax. I think of the "hard-earned" wealth of capitalists, and of the workers who have not even been paid correctly. How can anyone look at Amazon's media statements, their values, their propaganda and lies, and buy into any of this for a second?

As I emphasised above, to be an Amazon worker was to be simultaneously put in danger and held individually responsible, indeed punished, for the consequences of being put in danger – and even accused of endangering others. Workers who bust their backs every day are made to feel worthless, and yet the commodities they package and sort are treated like sacred idols – when they are not thrown around from excessive demand. The weight of this kind of environment was psychologically unbearable. It is only right in such environments that workers engaged in small acts of resistance. It is only right these go further!

Ultimately, it is not just the hum of conveyor belts and the screams of despotic managers that echo inside Amazon centres: beneath the surface, these places pulse with working class hatred and subtle acts of resistance. Of course, some workers were taken in, won over to the ideology of the place. "It's not a bad place to work, really", a co-worker once said to me, "sometimes we get biscuits." Biscuits. Not a secure job, a secure wage, safety at work or a modicum of respect, but biscuits. Let this speak to the reciprocity of capitalism, and to the lie of the "dignity" of labour at Amazon, free-enterprise's glorified shithole!



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