

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos: The richest man in modern history

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Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos' net worth surpassed \$150 billion on Monday, making him the richest person in modern world history.

The magnitude of such a sum is difficult to comprehend. Its real meaning emerges when juxtaposed with the social position of Amazon's 500,000 workers.

* Jeff Bezos has made \$50 billion in 2018. The \$255 million he has made *each day* of the year equals the annual salaries of over 10,000 Amazon workers in the US.

* The amount Bezos has made per second in 2018, \$2,950, is more than the annual salary of an Amazon worker in India, \$2,796.

* In five days of 2018, Bezos made as much money as the combined income of every Amazon fulfillment center worker in the world in 2017.

* If Bezos' wealth were divided equally among Amazon's employees, each would get a check for \$300,000.

* In the time it will take the average reader to read these five bullet points, Jeff Bezos will have made another \$70,000, seven times the global annual average income of \$10,000.

The existence of such fortunes exposes the oligarchic character of American and global society. Under capitalism, Bezos and billionaires like him dominate the political parties, select who is elected to public office, determine the policies of the world's governments, and dictate "public opinion" through their control over academic institutions and the media. Here too, Bezos is a prime example. He purchased the *Washington Post* in 2013 for \$250 million—less than what he now makes in a day.

Behind great wealth there are great social crimes. Bezos has made his billions through the ruthless exploitation of the Amazon workforce, which has more

than doubled in size since 2015, when Bezos's wealth was \$60 billion. Amazon has hired roughly 300,000 new workers since 2015, allowing Bezos to pocket the surplus labor value of a veritable army of the exploited.

Amazon has gained a competitive edge by introducing 21st century methods to squeeze every last drop of sweat from its workers, who wear monitoring devices that measure how hard they are working and are forced to walk or run up to 14 miles per day. Injuries are common, and deaths and suicides also take place with regularity. The National Council for Occupational Safety found Amazon among the most dangerous workplaces in the US.

Amazon is deeply implicated in the crimes of the US government, both in its imperialist wars abroad and in its Gestapo-like attack on democratic rights at home.

The company hosts the web servers for the US military and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and it sells its cloud service to Palantir, a data analytics firm that provides software used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to conduct raids and detain immigrants. In May, the ACLU reported that Amazon also sells Orwellian facial recognition software to police departments and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Opposition to this corporate giant is emerging, including from within the company itself.

In June, an undisclosed number of Amazon employees published a letter demanding the company halt its involvement in mass deportation and police surveillance. "This will be another powerful tool for the surveillance state, and ultimately serve to harm the most marginalized," the letter reads, citing IBM's involvement in providing Hitler with the infrastructure used to murder millions in concentration camps.

This year has also seen the development of a series of strikes at Amazon facilities worldwide. In Spain,

Poland and Germany, workers' anger over low wages, "permanent temporary" work, and brutal working conditions is near universal, forcing the trade unions to call limited protest strikes to coincide with "Prime Day"—a 36-hour sale period from July 16 to 17.

The trade unions' goal in calling the Prime Day protest strikes is the exact opposite of the aspirations of the workers participating in them.

In Spain, the union has kept the strike to a single fulfillment center. In Germany, the bulk of workers chose not to participate in a one-day strike called by the Verdi union, knowing Verdi regularly calls isolated strikes that will not impact corporate profits. In Poland, the union has only called a partial slow-down of work in order to block a broader strike.

While the workers want to shut down Amazon's supply chains and achieve massive increases in wages and significant improvements in working conditions, the unions have admitted from the onset that they are organizing the strikes as limited protests that will have no impact on Amazon's supply chains.

While workers aspire to unite in a common international struggle with their co-workers across national boundaries, the unions by their nature keep workers tied to "their own" nation-states and governments.

At Amazon and across all workplaces worldwide, the trade unions serve as an obstacle, not a conduit, for the development of the class struggle. Their leaderships, both in terms of political function and social composition, are hostile to the working-class members whose dues pay their salaries. The trade unions, through the relentless suppression of the class struggle at Amazon and elsewhere, are responsible for making Jeff Bezos' fortune possible.

In their struggles against the transnational corporations, workers must throw off the shackles of the trade unions and construct new, rank-and-file factory organizations.

These factory committees must fight to establish lines of communication between workers at different workplaces, not to isolate workers at each plant. They must be based on the principle that the interests of workers and capitalists are incompatible, not on "cooperation" between workers and management. They must foster the highest degree of democratic discussion, planning, and debate among the workers

themselves. They must be based on an understanding that the working class is an *international* social force and that workers are powerless when divided based on nationality.

The suppression of the class struggle has produced unprecedented levels of social inequality. In the United States, three people own the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of the population—160 million people. Worldwide, the five wealthiest own as much as the poorest half—3.6 billion people. Outside of the wealthiest 5 to 10 percent of the world's population, the masses of people face levels of economic hardship that vary only in degrees of extremity.

The existence of such extreme levels of inequality raises the urgent need for socialist revolution. Society cannot afford the capitalist system. The trillions of dollars that sit in corporate bank vaults and in the trust funds of the super wealthy must be expropriated and spent on massive international programs to provide water, food, education, culture, housing and infrastructure to every corner of the world.

The international integration of the world economy that under capitalism serves as a source of conflict, war and competition will become, under socialism, a mechanism for distributing resources from each region of the world according to its ability to each region according to the needs of its population. Amazon, with its complex logistical web spanning every continent and dozens of countries, will be transformed into a public utility to ship medicine, building material, food and disaster relief across the world.

Neither Bezos nor the capitalist class will give up their wealth without a fight. The working class must prepare for the coming class battles ahead by joining the fight for socialism.

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