

# Democrats, unions set trap for workers with phony May Day Amazon strike

By the International Amazon Workers Voice  
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In recent days, the corporate media has announced that Amazon, Whole Foods and Target workers will strike against their employers today, May 1.

There is doubtless a powerful fighting mood among workers who are being forced to work at these highly profitable corporations under life-threatening conditions, without protective equipment or paid time off work. Hundreds of thousands want a real fight against the companies.

But if this were a genuine strike, workers in these industries would have been involved in planning and organizing the action. On the contrary, the *World Socialist Web Site* and *International Amazon Workers Voice* spoke to dozens of Amazon and logistics workers, none of whom had heard of or had any say in planning this protest, which in reality is nothing more than a stunt.

The attitude of most workers was summarized by a Baltimore Amazon worker, who told the *International Amazon Workers Voice*: “I asked my fellow Amazonians about the May Day walkout, but none of them had even heard about it.”

Another Amazon worker said, “It’s bad enough that we are treated like puppets on a string while we are inside the building. It is worse that we are being manipulated and pounced on” by those involved in the so-called strike. “Workers will be fired immediately. It makes you wonder if these groups are actually hired by the company to weed out the ‘troublemakers.’” Many workers repeated these concerns.

If this were a genuine strike, the warehouses would be buzzing with activity and heated debate. Workers from major plants across the country would be democratically discussing the demands that must be raised. Strikers would be using social media to organize pickets, contact workers, elect captains and strike

committees, and prepare for mass action. As the sun rose on May 1, workers would be waking up with the confidence and knowledge that their own organizations were preparing to mobilize hundreds of thousands to do battle with the world’s most powerful corporations.

The May 1 action is, in reality, a trick aimed at blocking the growing opposition among retail, warehouse and gig workers over abysmal health and safety conditions amid the coronavirus pandemic. Without common mass action, workers protesting in isolation will face firings and retribution. This dangerous provocation is aimed at creating a mood of isolation and helplessness among workers. It is a ploy by the class enemy. Workers must not fall into the trap.

The May 1 stunt was announced on Twitter by Chris Smalls, a former Amazon manager who was involved in a walkout at Amazon’s JFK8 facility in Staten Island, New York in early April and was fired as a result. After taking this initially principled position at his plant, Smalls was swept up by the media attention and drew close to the Democratic Party and the trade unions, which are now making use of his newfound celebrity for their own pro-corporate aims.

Smalls made the strike announcement shortly after holding personal telephone discussions with Jesse Jackson, a Democratic Party operative and former Democratic candidate for president, who also addressed a phone call with a small number of individuals organized by Smalls last week.

The announcement was promoted in the *Intercept*, a website with close ties to the Democratic Party, and was soon thereafter picked up by the national news media. After Smalls’ announcement, various trade unions, including the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), proclaimed their support for the protest—a sure sign that nothing good can come of it.

The role of Jackson and the Democratic Party should give workers pause. For decades, Jackson has been the “kiss of death” of protest movements, which always dissipate after he shows up.

The Democratic Party has received hundreds of thousands of dollars from Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos in recent years. Bezos owns the *Washington Post*, which is also closely affiliated with the Democratic Party.

The trade unions have never had anything to do with the struggles of Amazon workers. At industries across the US, the trade unions have been forcing workers back to work under life-threatening conditions.

The May 1 protest stunt was announced because the ruling class is terrified of growing opposition among workers in every industry and wants to bring this emerging movement under its control.

In March and April, the US alone witnessed 150 strikes and protests organized by workers opposed to the absence of adequate precautions necessary to protect them against contracting the deadly virus.

Walkouts led by the workers themselves have taken place among autoworkers, nurses, Amazon workers, Instacart workers, and meatpacking workers. The latter even indicated that they would refuse a “back to work” order invoked by President Trump this week after 20 meatpacking workers died in recent weeks due to the disease.

The growing upsurge of working-class struggle is an international phenomenon. Mass protests and strikes have taken place in Italy, France, Bangladesh, and along the US-Mexico border, where auto parts workers at sweatshop *maquiladora* factories have walked out in large numbers.

In each country, the trade unions have scrambled to order workers back on the job, despite the risk of death. Corporations along the US-Mexico border have gone so far as to lock workers in the plants to prevent them from walking out. Dozens have been killed, and local hospitals are filling up with sick workers.

If workers are to protect their lives and the lives of their loved ones on the job, the necessary changes will not come through protests organized by Democratic Party politicians, trade union bureaucrats and opportunists looking for a new career path.

The companies are backed by the governments, the police, the media and the courts. But workers can fight back if they have their own organizations to combat

these powerful but hated institutions. They should form independent rank-and-file safety committees in every workplace, independent of the unions and both parties of big business, to organize and coordinate action across all plants and appeal to workers in every industry internationally.

These committees should demand no return to work at nonessential industries, while workers engaged in work that is essential to the functioning of society must be given the right to control the health and safety of their own facilities. All those who are laid off or fired must be given full income and benefits. Ultimately, these goals require the reorganization of the world economy along socialist principles, i.e., for public need and not private profit.

Strikes will be necessary, but if they are to effect change, they must be organized—well-organized—by the workers themselves. They must be capable of mobilizing a critical mass of workers so that those who are targeted for retribution can be defended by the workers *en masse*.

This requires socialist political leadership. One New Jersey Amazon worker told the *International Amazon Workers Voice*:

“The Democrats cannot be trusted; they are the problem as much as the free market-loving conservatives. Workers need leadership because many feel alone right now.”

Real social struggle does not take place through stunts set up from above. It means harnessing the tremendous potential power of the international working class, regardless of race or nationality, in a common struggle against the world’s most powerful corporations.

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