

Amazon uses former government agents to spy on workers

By Shuvu Batta
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A recent *Vice News* report revealed Amazon's longstanding surveillance operations, systematically targeting and monitoring the company's own workers on private Facebook Groups, with particular emphasis on posts calling for workers to organize or strike [1]. The investigation unveiled an intricate spying operation on Amazon's Flex Drivers, independent contractors who make possible the company's "last mile delivery."

Amazon utilized the domain www.sharkandink.com as a space—with no obvious connection to the conglomerate—to compile the reports. A login page included in the files obtained says: "the information related to different posts reported out from various social forums are classified. DO NOT SHARE without proper authentication. Most of the Post/Comment screenshots within the site are from closed Facebook groups. It will have a detrimental effect if it falls within the reach of any of our Delivery partners. DO NOT SHARE without proper authentication."

Amazon utilized a well-organized team, called the "Advocacy Operations Social Media Listening Team," to monitor the posts of workers. Posts are monitored in real time through a Live tool and sorted into various categories such as "Media Coverage," and are further subdivided to handle more specific topics such as "Strikes/Protests: DPs planning for any strike or protest against Amazon," and "DP approached by researchers—DPs being approached by researchers for their project/thesis," with "researchers" referring to journalists and "DPs" referring to Delivery Partners, another term for Flex drivers. Particularly significant posts are brought to the attention of Amazon's leadership.

According to an investigation published by *Open Markets* this month, navigation software for Amazon delivery drivers, called the Rabbit or Dora, is used to recommend and monitor routes and track the worker's productivity. The software only factors in 30 minutes for lunch and two separate 15-minute breaks during the day, and further demands that employees deliver 999 out of every 1,000 packages on time or face termination.

Within fulfillment centers, employing over 600,000 workers, Amazon workers face a similar regime of surveillance. Upon entering the warehouse workers have to dispose of all personal belongings except a water bottle and a clear plastic bag of cash. During the workday, Amazon watches over warehouse employees with a high-tech Panopticon of security cameras.

Workers' productivity is timed by a scanner, and if they are not quick enough they risk termination. At the end of their workday,

warehouse employees are screened to ensure that they have not stolen any items. Large television sets throughout the facilities often display former employees who were caught stealing and were subsequently terminated and/or arrested. This is to frighten and intimidate workers with proof of the efficacy of the constant surveillance.

Surveillance is used in conjunction with managers to prevent workers from organizing. According to Hibaq Mohamed, a stower in Minneapolis quote in a recent report: "Managers are always hovering around. They feel comfortable physically harassing people; that's a regular thing...The workers who speak up, they feel threatened physically and mentally...When they want to know something, the management, they use that camera. When we're organizing, when there was a slowdown of work before the pandemic in my area or my department, then we [workers] would come together and talk. But [the camera] is how they can come so quickly and spread workers out."

Private groups on Facebook and social media in general have become a way for workers to break the isolation promoted by management and connect with fellow co-workers. A recent example of the power of social media is the case of Jana Jumpp, a former Amazon employee who has compiled intensive data sourced from workers across the United States, showing infections and deaths from COVID-19 hidden by the company.

Amazon, which owns 32 percent of the world's online "cloud" infrastructure, is well aware of the power of online forms of communication and is ramping up its surveillance apparatus for the primary purpose of tracking workers—in great part by hiring corporate employees with spying expertise developed through state and military service.

The company recently advertised job postings for an "Intelligence Analyst" and "Sr. Intelligence Analyst," and subsequently took them down after the candid description of the job responsibilities received significant attention.

These jobs fall under Amazon's Global Security Operations (GSO) and Global Intelligence Program (GIP). The job listing read, "Analysts must be capable of engaging and informing L7+ ER Principals (attorney stakeholders) on sensitive topics that are highly confidential, including labor organizing threats against the company, establish and track funding and activities connected to corporate campaigns (internal and external) against Amazon, and provide sophisticated analysis on these topics."

L7 means the seventh rung on Amazon's corporate ladder. Jeff

Bezos, CEO and world's richest man, is L12. ER means employee relations. An "Intelligence Analyst" is essentially a spy for the company, informing those in leadership positions within the world's largest corporation of anything that threatens their profits, primarily the organized resistance of workers. The demand for this type of high-level corporate goon has grown sharply since 2018, from 7 posts featuring the terms "GSO" or "GIP" in July of 2018 to 46 as of September 8, 2020, according to a report compiled by *Thinknum*.

In a more recent description of the position of Intelligence Analyst on LinkedIn, Amazon specifically writes: "Previous experience in Intelligence analysis and/or watch officer skill set in the intelligence community, the military, law enforcement, or a related global security role in the private sector" is a "preferred qualification".

A search on LinkedIn of Amazon GSOC(Global Security Operation Center) employees yields results such as John A. Barrios, a senior manager of GSOC who formerly worked for the FBI for over 11 years, and Nathan Nguyen, a GSOC manager and former Intelligence analyst from the US Army. When the keyword "Amazon Intelligence" is entered, Joel Rodriguez, the Head of Amazon Intelligence in the Americas and a former Senior Intelligence Officer in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and former Intelligence Analyst for the Department of Justice, is one of the results.

In addition to its mid-level staff, Amazon has integrated leading figures of the US military apparatus into its company leadership. General Keith Alexander, the former National Security Agency (NSA) chief, will be joining Amazon's board of directors, the central body responsible for overseeing the operations of the global conglomerate, with almost 800,000 full time employees. Alexander led the NSA from August 2005 to May 2010. From 2010 to 2013 he was head of Cyber Command, which has as its mission, according to the Department of Defense, to "ensure US/Allied freedom of action in cyberspace and deny the same to our adversaries."

As whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed, the NSA, alongside the CIA, created a massive spying apparatus with the goal "to collect all the world's digital communications, store them for ages and search through them at will." The agencies created programs which could forcibly enter an individual's electronic device and store their private information without consent, violating the constitutionally guaranteed "right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures."

Edward Snowden is now exiled in Russia for exposing this criminal conspiracy against democratic rights, and has been hounded by both US capitalist parties, the Democrats and Republicans.

Amazon is in the process of rapid expansion, with plans to invest tens of billions of dollars over the course of the year in order to greatly increase the company's domination across myriad sectors of the economy. However, the growing militancy of Amazon workers, spurred by inadequate safety measures during the pandemic, threatens to derail their plans. Over the past several months, Amazon workers have engaged in localized spontaneous

strikes around the US, together with strikes by thousands of workers in Europe. This has been alongside massive protests against police brutality around the world.

At present, a growing strike wave of teachers, students and workers opposed to "re-opening" the economy during the pandemic is emerging, which threatens to encourage broad layers of Amazon workers to take strike action.

Increasingly fearful of rank and file workers, and viewing them as the biggest threat to the company's profits, Amazon is ramping up its spying operations, in line with its growing integration with the US military and intelligence apparatus. The news of General Alexander joining Amazon's leadership was revealed in a Securities and Exchange Commission filing two days ago. Amazon's management, composed of leading members of the capitalist class and headed by the world's richest man, intend to use the expertise cultivated by its former state and military staff against "domestic terrorism" as a weapon against rank and file workers, who are increasingly connected through online forms of communication. Amazon is not unique in using these methods. In 2015, Walmart hired an intelligence-gathering service from the military contractor Lockheed Martin to survive and weed out workers' resistance.

Amazon workers must not be intimidated. The corporation's surveillance crackdown is not a show of strength, but of weakness. It is terrified of the growing resistance of rank-and-file workers. In order to defend their lives and livelihood, teachers and autoworkers, with the support of the *World Socialist Web Site*, have formed rank and file committees, democratic organizations in the fullest sense of the term, as the beginning of a great struggle to unite all sections of the working class in a fight to ensure their safety and build a better world.

We encourage Amazon workers to contact us at the International Amazon Workers Voice. We will respect your anonymity and do everything we can to protect your identity from company spies.

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>