

Amazon Will Face Black Friday Strikes and Protests in 20 Countries

 [vice.com/en/article/m7vebb/amazon-will-face-black-friday-strikes-and-protests-in-20-countries](https://www.vice.com/en/article/m7vebb/amazon-will-face-black-friday-strikes-and-protests-in-20-countries)

On Black Friday, a group of unions and grassroots organizations, known as the Make Amazon Pay Coalition, will stage coordinated protests and strikes in at least 20 countries to demand Amazon pay workers a living wage, respect their right to join unions, pay its fair share of taxes, and commit to meaningful environmental sustainability.

Planned actions include: a massive Amazon delivery driver strike in Italy; a work stoppage across Amazon warehouses in France; demonstrations at the construction site of new Amazon regional offices in South Africa; garment worker protests across Bangladesh and Cambodia.

In the United States, the Athena Coalition will be holding digital and in-person #MakeAmazonPay actions targeting Whole Foods and Amazon, a town hall about the future of worker organizing in California, and a worker panel in Illinois on supply chain disruptions.

The actions across the world on November 26 will highlight the scale of Amazon's role in the global economy.

The Make Amazon Pay coalition launched last year with a day of protests on Black Friday, when it unveiled a set of common demands from 50 social justice organizations, including Progressive International, the Athena Coalition, GreenPeace, Our Revolution, Oxfam, and the Sunrise Movement. Since then, the coalition has swelled to more than 70 unions, grassroots organizations, tax watchdogs, and environmentalist groups.

"This year's actions are set to be much larger with strikes and protests planned in multiple cities in at least 20 countries across every inhabited continent on earth," a press release for the global event said. "The global day of action will bring together activists from different struggles - labor, environment, tax, data, privacy, anti-monopoly - as trade unionists, civil society activists and environmentalists hold joint actions."

Black Friday and Cyber Monday mark Amazon's biggest sales events of the year. But for Amazon's warehouse workers and delivery drivers, it means increased quotas, longer workdays, and a higher risk of injury. Between Black Friday and Christmas, warehouse worker injuries spike, according to a 2019 report by the Reveal Center for Investigative Reporting.

In addition to the countries listed above, Black Friday actions will take place in Canada, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Poland, Germany, Slovakia, Austria, Luxembourg, Spain, Ireland, Turkey, Australia, New Zealand, Bangladesh, India, and Cambodia.

"The workers, advocates, and elected officials coming together to #MakeAmazonPay have captured the world's imagination and are changing the way the public perceives Amazon," Christy Hoffman, general secretary of UNI Global Union, said. "On global action days like Black Friday, we are seeing how the

movement pushing to change the rules of our economy and challenge corporate power is growing bolder and stronger.

The #MakeAmazonPay coalition is led by UNI Global Union, a global union federation, which is affiliated with 150 unions that represent 20 million workers worldwide, and Progressive International, an international organization uniting left-wing activist groups.

“From natural resource extraction, to manufacturing; from shipping and storing products around the world to delivering them to consumers; from controlling untold amounts of data and management to influencing our governments: Amazon takes workers, people and the planet for a ride,” said Casper Gelderblom, Make Amazon Pay coordinator at the Progressive International.

“Amazon may be everywhere, but we are too,” he continued. “At every link in this chain of abuse, we are fighting back to Make Amazon Pay. On Black Friday 26 November 2021, around the world, workers and activists will rise up in strikes, protests and actions to Make Amazon Pay.”

In response to news of Make Amazon Pay’s day of action, Kelly Nantel, director of national media relations at Amazon, told Motherboard, “These groups represent a variety of interests, and while we’re not perfect in any area, if you objectively look at what Amazon is doing in each one of these areas you’ll see that we take our role and our impact very seriously. We are inventing and investing significantly in all these areas, playing a significant role in addressing climate change with the Climate Pledge commitment to be net zero carbon by 2040, continuing to offer competitive wages and great benefits, and inventing new ways to keep our employees safe and healthy in our operations network, to name just a few. Anyone can see for themselves by taking a live virtual tour at our sites.”

Nantel added that Amazon’s average starting wage is more than \$18 an hour, depending on location, and that Amazon hired more workers in 2020 than any other company in the United States.

The Black Friday protests come during an extended period of labor unrest at Amazon across the United States. Union drives are currently underway at Amazon fulfillment centers in Bessemer, Alabama and New York City—and earlier this year, the Teamsters, one of the country’s largest unions, launched a coordinated national project to unionize Amazon. Motherboard recently published leaked audio from a heated anti-union meeting at Amazon’s fulfillment center in New York City, where workers confronted managers about dangerous and grueling working conditions.

Globally, Amazon employs 1.3 million people, making it one of the largest employers on the planet. The company is on track to become the largest employer in the United States in the next year or two.

“Amazon’s power to brutalize workers and starve out local businesses is global,” said Yessenia Prodero, an immigrant rights organizer with Massachusetts Jobs With Justice, an Athena coalition member group. “We will only truly challenge that power if we build power globally. We have strategized with our international partners for years to tell a consistent story across continents, and we are seeing those efforts gain momentum. These actions are an important public escalation, and there will be a lot more to come.”

Across Italy, as many as 15,000 Amazon delivery drivers, who are employed by contractors and members of three Italian transportation unions, will strike for 24-hours on November 26. Striking workers will demand lighter workloads, a reduction of weekly working hours, performance bonuses, and new privacy rules on data management and surveillance.

In September, warehouse workers in Italy reached a historic, first-ever agreement with Amazon after they staged a 24-hour national strike.

Elisa Gigliarelli, coordinator of international policy, for FILT-CGIL, Italy's largest transportation union, says that the warehouse worker strike which successfully pressured Amazon to sign an agreement with unions earlier this year will serve as a model for Italian delivery drivers' Black Friday strike and demands.

"This general strike doesn't come out of the blue," Gigliarelli told Motherboard. "It's the result of our previous actions in the last month and year, which were very successful in terms of participation and political and media impact."

"Amazon has two sectors: warehouses and delivery," she continued. "In Italy, the drivers who deliver goods for Amazon don't work directly for Amazon, but for contracted companies. We have to consider warehouse workers and delivery drivers as a whole entity because in the end, the indirect and direct workers work for the same company and make Amazon bigger and richer. We have to consider the entire supply chain."

In the United Kingdom, GMB, a trade union which represents Amazon warehouse workers, delivery drivers, and tech workers, will stage protests at a number of worksites across the country, including a major Amazon site in London. Workers are demanding union recognition from Amazon. (In the United Kingdom, workers have the right of free association with unions, but Amazon has refused to sit down to negotiate with any union.)

"We're going to be targeting 10 main facilities," said Mick Rix, a national officer at GMB, a trade union which has more than 600,000 members in the U.K. "Part of the action will be exposing the nonsense of Jeff Bezos wanting to leave the planet on a spacecraft. It will be a bit personal."

In Bangladesh, two unions representing garment workers who produce for Amazon's private labels will mobilize in the cities of Dhaka and Chittagong. Meanwhile, in Cambodia, garment factory workers from the Hulu Garment factory which supplied for Amazon and Adidas until it shuttered in March 2020, will demonstrate to ensure they are paid \$3.6 million in severance.

In Cape Town, South Africa, a community organization will protest at the construction site of Amazon's so-called River Club real development, the future home of Africa's Amazon headquarters.

In addition to protests and strikes planned around the world, Make Amazon Pay has chosen eight locations to represent Amazon's abuses and unity and resistance to the tech behemoth, where actions will also take place, including a oil refinery in Latin America, a supply chain factory in Asia, a container ship in Latin America, a warehouse in North America, a trucking depot in Europe, a regional office in Africa, and a finance ministry in Europe.

“As we are seeing all over the world, workers—whether they are coders, pickers, drivers or UX designers—are marching, striking and raising their voices together to demand the dignity and respect that comes with a union,” Hoffman, the president of UNI Global Union said. “Solidarity doesn’t scare easily, and Amazon will not break workers’ alliances.”

ORIGINAL REPORTING ON EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS IN YOUR INBOX.
