

Workers are trying to make Amazon pay

Amazon, the giant online retailer company, is global—and so is the labor movement’s fight against it. Union representatives, Amazon workers, activists and advocacy groups gathered at “The Summit to Make Amazon Pay” in Manchester, England, at the end of October to strategize about how to make the company pay its fair share—to its workers as well as to the communities and governments where it operates.

NALC joined the meetings as part of UNI Global Union’s Amazon Alliance. Assistant to the President for Administrative Affairs Chris Henwood and Director of Research Holly Feldman-Wiencek represented NALC.



Director of Research Holly Feldman-Wiencek addresses the Manchester summit.

discuss organizing strategies and legislative opportunities, and provide support and solidarity to Amazon workers.

UNI formed the alliance about a decade ago, and NALC joined in 2019 when it became clear that Amazon was aggressively entering the delivery industry. The alliance, which meets about twice a year, includes labor

unions from Germany, Spain, Poland, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, South Africa and the United States. The October meeting, for the first time, also included unions from New Zealand and India, reflecting Amazon’s expanding global presence.

The summit featured panels of experts who discussed the ways Amazon uses its size and power to influence markets and governments to increase its profits, as well as how to limit this influence. Amazon’s tax-avoidance strategy means that it rarely contributes to the communities where it places its facilities, even as it has cornered the market on state and local government supply procurement, further increasing its profits. Often the solution must come from legislative and regulatory reform.

While the U.S. Federal Trade Commission’s antitrust case against Amazon filed in September could lead to reforms that limit this power, other countries provide instructional examples of laws and regulatory structures that could be used in the United States. India recently passed a law aimed at Amazon that limits it to acting only as a marketplace for other retailers to sell their goods, meaning Amazon cannot sell Amazon-branded products on the website, which has restricted its ability to profit there.

The summit also discussed on-the-ground organizing efforts—with some wins and losses for labor unions. Amazon warehouse workers and delivery drivers shared their experiences working for the company, highlighting the high injury rate, extreme speed of work and low pay, along with the fierce anti-union tactics Amazon uses to prevent workers from organizing.

While there have been only two successful attempts so far to form a union among Amazon workers in the

United States, experiences from other countries are informative. Labor laws and industry structures in European countries, particularly Germany, Italy and Belgium, have forced Amazon to follow certain pay rates and sectoral rules. However, even when there are stricter laws in place, Amazon refuses to bargain or cooperate in good faith.

A highlight of the summit for the NALC contingent was meeting and learning from Jessie Moreno, a delivery driver employed by a small delivery company that works exclusively for Amazon and that recently unionized and joined the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Rather than employing its own delivery drivers, Amazon contracts with small delivery companies, called delivery service partners (DSPs), which employ the drivers. However, Amazon still controls every element of these drivers’ jobs. This employment structure, which is a form of employee misclassification, allows Amazon to hire and fire DSPs as it wants. This model is intentional so that Amazon can ruthlessly quash unionization efforts.

Jessie and his co-workers, who deliver in Palmdale, CA, were worried about working in the desert heat and they also protested their low pay. Their DSP owner understood their concerns and voluntarily recognized their union earlier this year. Amazon refused to engage and fired the entire DSP after the successful union vote, but that has not deterred the drivers. The workers in Palmdale have been on strike since the Amazon firing. “One day longer, one day stronger!” Jessie said as the strike went into its 125th day.

Finally, unions and activists shared and strategized over what collective actions against Amazon could be taken on the then-upcoming Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving in the United States



and the busiest shopping day of the year. Unions across the world planned strikes, walkouts, protests and media outreach, all aimed at building worker power, sharing their struggles with the public, and getting Amazon’s attention.

Unlike the first alliance meeting that NALC staff attended in 2019, where little progress had been made in organizing and addressing Amazon’s immense power, this meeting showed how much work had been done in the few years since. In addition to some small, yet significant, organizing wins, the largest change has been in how the public narrative has shifted against the company. Media coverage and the public are gaining an understanding of the many exploitative and predatory tactics of the company. This is thanks in large part to the many unions, community groups and advocacy organizations that have come together to shed light on Amazon’s poor labor and business practices. There remains, however, much more to do.

Manchester was a particularly appropriate place to hold such a meeting. The city, which was a small town for much of its history, expanded quickly at the turn of the 19th century, when it became one of the centers of textile manufacturing during the Industrial Revolution. While the Industrial Revolution brought wealth to the city, many workers suffered from meager pay and poor working conditions and lived in substandard housing in a city covered with smoke from factories. But workers fought to improve their lives, organizing to earn better working conditions as well as the right to vote. The city takes pride in its strong labor history.

Like Manchester once was, Amazon is a center of capitalism today. It is heartening to be reminded that workers have organized to overcome industrial power and greed in the past. With all of our help, Amazon workers will try to do it again and make Amazon pay its fair share. **PR**

Penalty overtime exclusion set

As referenced in Article 8, Sections 4 and 5 of the USPS-NALC National Agreement, the December period during which penalty overtime regulations are not applicable consists of four consecutive service weeks. This year, the December period begins Pay Period 26-23, Week 1 (Dec. 2, 2023) and ends Pay Period 01-24, Week 2 (Dec. 29, 2023).

NALC documentary shown at film fest

On Oct. 28, NALC’s documentary, “The Revolt of the Good Guys,” was screened at the Workers Unite Film Festival (WUFF) at Cinema Village theater in New York City. The film details the buildup and explosion of the 1970 Great Postal Strike, as well as the roles of NALC President James Rademacher and the wildcat strike’s leader, Vincent Sombrotto.

WUFF is New York’s only labor film festival and is in its 12th season. It aims to feature student and professional films from the United States and around the world that highlight the struggles, successes and daily lives of all workers in their efforts to unite and

organize for better living conditions and social justice.

In addition to members of the general public, the audience for the film included New York Branch 36 members and 1970 strikers Jose Ramos, Harold Hillard and Eugene Spry; the film’s narrator (and also a



striker) Wally Padulo of Jersey City, NJ Branch 42; and six members of the Sombrotto family. **PR**