

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC

September 16, 2020

Jeff Bezos
Chief Executive Officer
Amazon.com, Inc.
410 Terry Ave. North
Seattle, WA 98109

Dear Mr. Bezos:

We are deeply troubled by recent news reports that reveal the extent to which Amazon monitors its workers' social media postings for expressions of discontent and efforts to collectively advocate for workplace improvements. Amazon's poor health and safety record and union-busting policies¹ have been well-documented, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.²³ It is distressing that, even in the midst of a public health emergency, your company continues to take the extreme step of conducting surveillance on your workers to thwart their efforts to organize instead of taking the necessary steps to reverse your anti-worker policies and support your workers.

Vice News recently reported on Amazon's extensive, secret program that monitored workers' posts in closed Facebook groups.⁴ Your company has named this program the Orwellian-sounding Advocacy Operations Social Listening Team. This program provides regular updates to corporate staff on the content and frequency of workers' posts, including the identity of the workers who made the posts. Amazon knew that the disclosure of this program would have consequences; the login page for those doing the monitoring emphasized the secret, potentially damaging, nature of the work, particularly if shared with those who are being spied on.

¹ CNBC.com, "How Amazon is fighting back against workers' increasing efforts to unionize," Katie Schoolov, August 22, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/08/22/how-amazon-is-fighting-back-against-workers-efforts-to-unionize.html>

² Bloomberg, "Amazon Workers Sue Over Virus Brought Home from Warehouse," Josh Eidelson and Spencer Soper, June 3, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-03/amazon-warehouse-employees-sue-over-virus-brought-home-from-work>

³ Bloomberg Businessweek, "Covid Gag Rules at U.S. Companies Are Putting Everyone at Risk," Josh Eidelson, August 27, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-08-27/covid-pandemic-u-s-businesses-issue-gag-rules-to-stop-workers-from-talking>

⁴ Vice News, "Inside Amazon's Secret Program to Spy on Workers' Private Facebook Groups," Lauren Kaori Gurley and Joseph Cox, September 1, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/3azegw/amazon-is-spying-on-its-workers-in-closed-facebook-groups-internal-reports-show

This level of surveillance would be troubling even if it were focused on troubleshooting delivery problems experienced by your workers, but the scope of the monitoring went well beyond that. The program also collected information on workers' complaints about their working conditions, the sharing of news articles that were critical of Amazon, comments about planned strikes or protests, and whether workers had been approached by researchers examining Amazon's workforce. The magnitude of this surveillance, the lengths to which Amazon went to keep it hidden from your own workers, and its admitted purpose are extremely disturbing and are indicative of just how much of a threat Amazon perceives its own workers to be.

Amazon's anti-worker, anti-union efforts are not limited to the Advocacy Operations Social Listening Team, however. For months this year, Amazon sought to hire "Intelligence Analysts" tasked with tracking and responding to "threats" from organized labor.⁵ In addition to reporting to high-level company officials on dynamic situations, including geopolitical crises, the job description states that the Intelligence Analyst will be required to report to company officers on "sensitive topics that are highly confidential, including labor organizing threats against the company." In addition, the job duties include developing "sophisticated search strings," also known as monitoring programs, to assess future risk, which includes "organized labor, activist groups, hostile political leaders." And finally, the position requires working with subject matter experts on "topics of importance to Amazon, including hate groups, policy initiatives, geopolitical issues, terrorism, law enforcement, and organized labor." While your company has since modified the posting for the Intelligence Analyst positions, it is clear they accurately represent the company's view: Amazon perceives workers' collective action and union membership as an existential threat on par with hate groups, geopolitical crises, and terrorism. That is unconscionable.

It is also contrary to the company's public display of appreciation for its workers. During the pandemic, Amazon has been airing a television advertisement titled "Thank You Amazon Heroes" in which the narrator thanks Amazon's workers, calling them "heroes," and says the company "will do everything we can to keep you healthy, safe, and protected."⁶ This is not even remotely true. As evidenced by the Advocacy Operations Social Listening Team and the Intelligence Analyst job openings, Amazon believes its own workers are a threat to the company. And the company will go to great lengths to undermine any attempts by workers to join together to earn the pay, benefits, working conditions, and respect they deserve. If anything, Amazon's outsized efforts to police and control its own workers prove that they would benefit greatly from union representation.

We urge you to immediately denounce and end Amazon's anti-worker, anti-union efforts, including the Advocacy Operations Social Listening Team. In addition, we call on you to reaffirm Amazon workers' federally protected rights to collective action and to form a union and

⁵ Vice News, "Amazon Is Hiring an Intelligence Analyst to Track 'Labor Organizing Threats'," Lorenzo Franceschi-Bicchierai, September 1, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qj4aqw/amazon-hiring-intelligence-analyst-to-track-labor-organizing-threats

⁶ Amazon, "Thank you Amazon Heroes," March 27, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Z7PY4bOvvo

to announce that the company will remain neutral in any organizing efforts its workers choose to pursue.

Amazon's television ad is correct. Your workers are heroes, not threats, and they deserve to be treated as such.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Sherrod Brown in blue ink.

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Ron Wyden in blue ink.

Ron Wyden
United States Senator