

# THE AMAZON WORKER



ENGLISH

## WHO IS AWI?

Amazon Workers International, is a global network of Amazon employees advocating for better wages and working conditions in the company's whole network. While AWI is not a union itself, AWI members actively participate in their respective country's labor unions. Together, we strive to amplify the voices of Amazon workers and push for positive change within the company.

## WHAT DOES AWI DO?

Today, not only colleagues from Germany and Poland, but also from numerous other countries actively participate in AWI. Our diverse and wide-reaching network consists of employees from France, Spain, Great Britain, the USA, Turkey, Slovakia, and more. Every six months, we gather at various locations to learn from each other, share experiences and information, and strategize for joint actions and initiatives. This multinational cooperation enhances our collective knowledge and fosters a truly global perspective within AWI. Every Amazon worker is warmly invited to our meetings! Just get in touch with us.

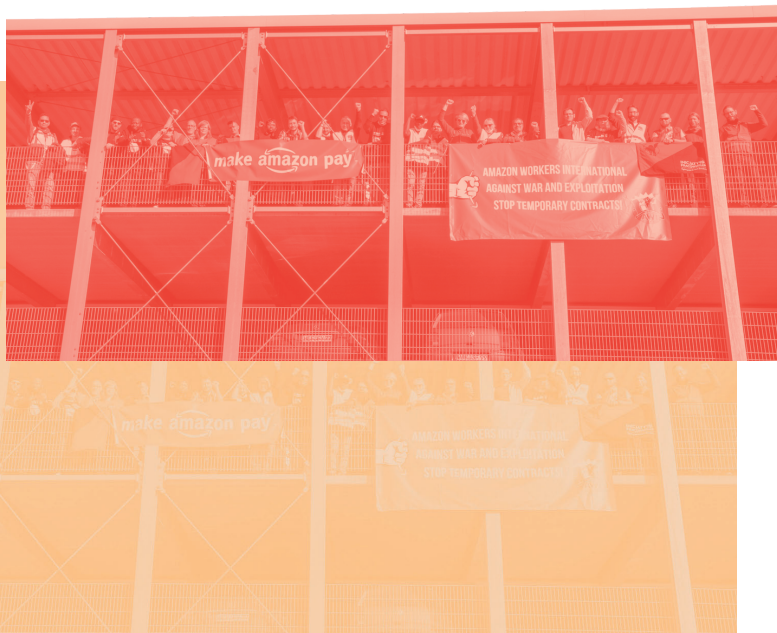


## WHY WAS AWI FOUNDED?

In spring 2013, the ver.di called the first official strike in the company's history of Amazon in Germany. However, the company reacted. In 2015, Amazon strikes led to the company expanding to Poland for lower wages. When German workers went on strike, Amazon shifted shipping to Poland, burdening Polish colleagues with overtime. To show solidarity Polish workers refused to work and organized a spontaneous slow down. After that they joined forces with German colleagues, founding AWI. We recognize Amazon's global operations and the need for cross-border organization. We are colleagues, not competitors! Let's unite and stand strong together!

## WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF AWI?

We stay connected to stay informed about management actions and labor struggles at other sites. By supporting each other, we are strengthening our demands on Amazon. During the pandemic, we often had better information than our supervisors and took collective actions to protect our health and secure a Corona bonus. We also visit each other during strikes. For example, Polish workers who work at Amazon in Germany are pleased when trade unionists from their home country show solidarity. These exchanges provide valuable suggestions and learnings, such as organizing more colleagues or implementing surveillance limitations based on agreements reached elsewhere. Furthermore, we actively engage with journalists and politicians to advocate for our demands and raise awareness about our cause in the public sphere.



# WE DON'T WANT TO BE CHEAP LABOR!



Recently Amazon has again announced great financial results. It has reported its highest earnings since 2020. Us workers continue to produce fortunes, but we don't benefit from it. Workers in Poland earn the least in the European Union. We mostly ship to customers from abroad, mostly from Germany. We have had enough of being cheap labor!

Amazon Poland announced on August 2, 2023, a wage increase (to be introduced not earlier than October). Despite high domestic inflation, this is the first raise this year. And it is outrageously low – 1,50 PLN gross [0.34 EUR]. Level-1 warehouse workers (the vast majority) will earn 26 PLN per hour gross [5.82 EURO]. After one year of seniority, it will be 26.50 PLN [5.93 EUR]; and after two, 27.50 [6,15 EUR] – before tax. This means that the base salary will be almost equal to the minimum wage (about 4250 PLN without bonuses, 951 EUR before tax, which means 3228 PLN in cash, 722 EUR) – as the monthly minimum wage will increase in Poland from January 1, 2024, to 4,242 PLN [948 EUR], and from July 1 to PLN 4,300 PLN [962 EUR].

Not counting statutory night work or overtime bonuses, the 15% attendance bonus is the only additional component of the salary in Poland. But we will only have to be more than 5 minutes late once a month and the bonus is reduced to 10%. Two days of absence mean the bonus falls to 5%, and if this occurs on more than two days - the bonus is not paid at all.

Since Amazon came to Poland in 2014, wages have never been so low in relation to the minimum wage. Once again, we are painfully aware that global corporations are making savings and making mega profits from workers in Poland. What makes this possible, is the a lack of any real right to strike in the country: to hold one requires winning a referendum with an absurd 50% turnout threshold (calculated according to the full number of employers in the company: presently approx. 20,000 workers). The fact that many workers have only agency and temporary contracts make them afraid to act.

The OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza union demanded a PLN 6 raise. It has carried out many activities: from petitioning, to negotiations with management, including official mediation, holding pickets, producing leaflets, and finally holding a referendum. 4,978 people voted, with an overwhelming majority in favour of striking. However, this was not enough to hold a strike – according to the highly restrictive Polish law. This was mainly because Amazon did not let in the union representatives to half the warehouses in Poland. The public prosecutor's office is investigating whether they broke the law.

The union OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza has more than 1,000 Amazon employees and is the largest union in the corporation, but this is not enough to bring about changes to wage levels. More involvement is needed from each of us. We need to stop being afraid, propose changes, wear union lanyards, speak out at stand-up meetings, encourage others to join the union, and try new tactics. We also need international solidarity and inspiration from Amazon workers in other countries. We need to know how they are organizing and improving working conditions. Join us!

JOIN US!

## LET'S ORGANIZE THE DELIVERY STATIONS!

In recent years, Amazon has opened about 100 delivery stations in Germany. Amazon tries to become independent from other companies. Unionization is still in the beginning. Last year, the workforce at DNM1 in Wunstorf (near Hanover) was the first to elect a works council.

## WHY IS IT PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT TO ORGANIZE IN THE DELIVERY STATIONS?

If there is a strike at a fulfillment center, Amazon can often reroute orders and have them shipped from another location. However, if the packages are already at a delivery station, they cannot be redistributed. So a strike here would be noticed directly by customers! Amazon would no longer be able to reliably supply the market.

## WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

In Wunstorf, the workers decided not to accept the situation in their Delivery Station. They started to meet regularly and to talk about their problems. They used social networks to exchange ideas, too. Then they got in touch with their labor union, ver.di. They decided to form a works council and to use it as a tool to promote the workers' interests and to organize the workers for the union that they can strike in the near future. This is because its members are protected from dismissal and can perform their duties during working hours. [ >> For more information about the works council, p. 5]

Amazon did not always make it easy for the union activists with the establishment of the works council, but attacks could also be fought off with the support of ver.di. At the first attempt, the union list won 6 out of 9 seats in the election. The workers were not impressed by Amazon lighting up the grill and handing out free bratwursts on election day.

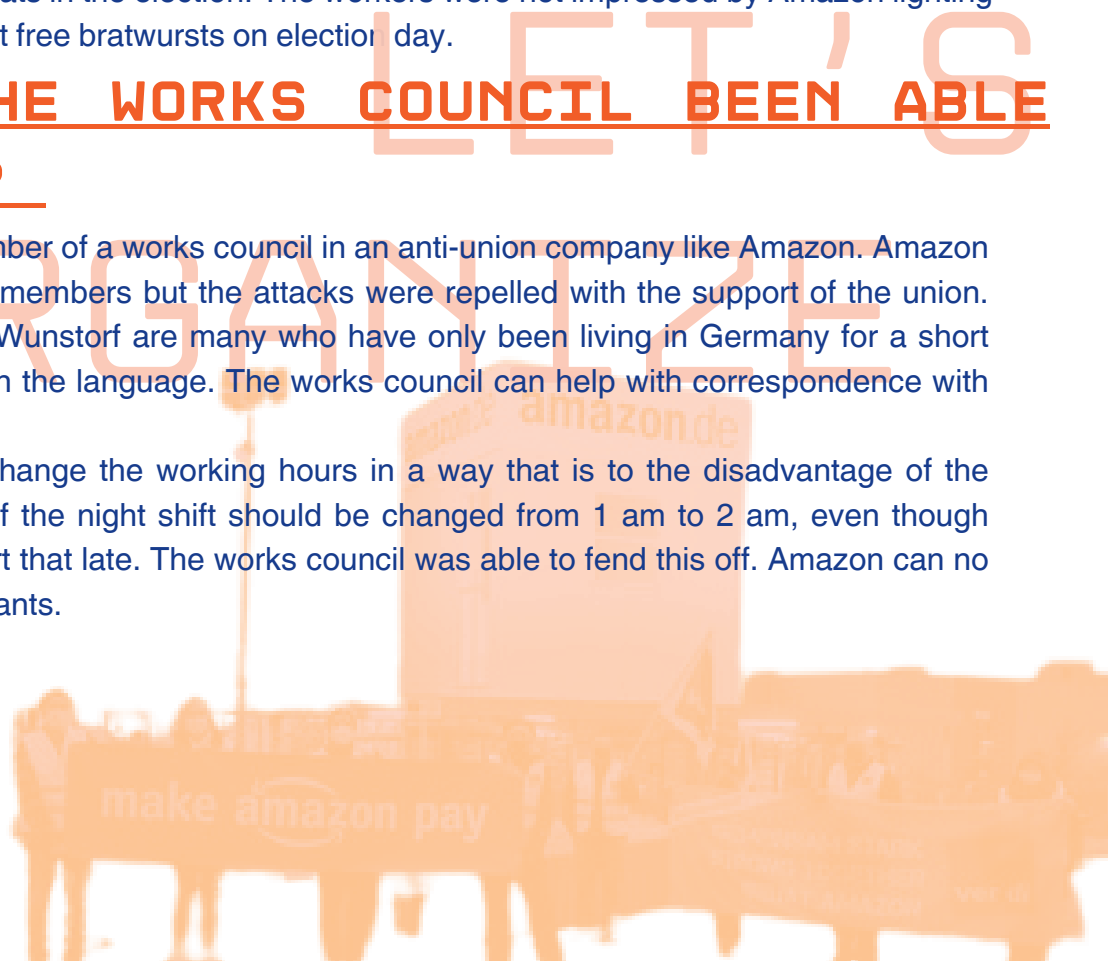
## WHAT HAS THE WORKS COUNCIL BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE?

It is a hard job to be a member of a works council in an anti-union company like Amazon. Amazon tries to get rid of elected members but the attacks were repelled with the support of the union. Among the colleagues in Wunstorf are many who have only been living in Germany for a short time and still have to learn the language. The works council can help with correspondence with the HR department.

Amazon keeps trying to change the working hours in a way that is to the disadvantage of the workers. The start time of the night shift should be changed from 1 am to 2 am, even though there is no public transport that late. The works council was able to fend this off. Amazon can no longer simply do what it wants.



ver.di



# IRA, AN AMAZON-WORKER FROM NEW YORK TOLD US ABOUT HIS PLANS TO ORGANIZE DELIVERY STATIONS:



*“In New York City itself, you will find the fulfilment centre JFK8, which employs between 6,000 and 8,000 workers... Now, JFK8 is not the only fulfilment centre that can distribute parcels across New York City. It is merely the only one within the city limits. ... So if JFK8 organizes 6,000 or 7,000 workers, for example, Amazon will still be able to distribute parcels across New York City... There are perhaps 10 or 12 delivery stations that deliver to New York City and they employ 200 workers on average. That’s a total of 2,000 people — just a third of the workforce at a fulfilment centre. But Amazon can’t supply New York City smoothly without the delivery stations ... The company is becoming increasingly dependent on the “last mile” ... where it is reducing the market share of UPS and the US Postal Service. If there are organizers at ... half of these stations, and they are in a position to organize strikes and walkouts ... then that has serious implications for Amazon’s ability... to reliably serve the New York market and for the promise Amazon makes to its customers... We have been conducting work stoppages at times when it has become impossible for the current shift to cope with the volume. They then have to either finish it off in the next shift or send it to other fulfilment centres. In March, we led walk-outs in fulfilment centres with overlapping territories. This can have a considerable impact, as the volume they cannot handle in our warehouse cannot be sent on to another warehouse.”*

THE ORGANISATION OF WORKERS AND THEIR INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION DIFFERENTLY IN GERMANY AND POLAND BASED ON THE RESPECTIVE NATIONAL LAW BUT IN BOTH COUNTRIES AMAZON WORKERS SHARE THE SAME GOAL: TO MAXIMISE THE IMPACT OF THEIR WANTS AND NEEDS WITH THE AIM OF IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS AND CREATING A MORE DEMOCRATIC WORK ENVIRONMENT.



## WORKS COUNCILS

Works councils are elected by the entire workforce in a company and represent the interests of the workforce against the employer. They have co-determination, advisory and information rights, e.g.

- Determination of working hours and vacation
- occupational health and safety measures
- distribution of salaries between the wage groups
- technical monitoring and performance checks

At some sites, this has stopped individual performance reviews and feedback meetings (see <https://organizeawas.de/en/>).

Most, although not all, works councils in Germany work closely with the trade union responsible for the branch. Works councils are not allowed to make any agreements on pay, number of vacation days, shift bonuses and the like – only trade unions can negotiate this in collective agreements.

- The institution of works councils (like the one in Germany) does not exist in Poland. Workers organize to represent their interests against the employer through unions, which establish workplace sections.
- Unions can make agreements with the employer on pay as well as on work conditions and social benefits. These agreements benefit all workers, no matter if they are members of the union or not. Unions have the right to negotiate, consult and ask for information.

### Social Work Inspectors

Social Work Inspectors are elected by the workers in a company. The structure and number of Social Work Inspectors is organized by the unions at the workplace. Social Work Inspectors have the right to control the proper application of labor law as well as health and safety regulations at the workplace. If a job is unsafe, a Social Workplace Inspector can order it to be stopped.

## UNIONS

Workers join unions to achieve better working conditions and good wages. In Germany, the trade unions are divided according to sectors.

You join the union responsible for your industry.

For Amazon, this is the union ver.di.

- Trade unions in Germany lead wage movements in the companies. Unlike the works council, it can call for strikes.
- The membership fee is 1 percent of your gross monthly salary. Your employer does not know that you are a member of a trade union.

Unions allow workers to act collectively to achieve better working conditions and higher wages at a single or in multiple workplaces. In Poland, workers can organize in more than one union at a company. The largest unions in terms

of the number of worker-members have the most rights to negotiate with the employer. This is called being a representative union. At Amazon in Poland, OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza (Workers' Initiative) is the representative union.

- Unions can call for strikes, but this is complicated by a very difficult legal procedure. In many cases, unions must act together in order to make effective changes.
- The membership fee for OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza is 15 złoty a month.



## GERMANY

## POLAND

## COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS

- A collective agreement (“Tarifvertrag”) can regulate many questions of working conditions such as: wages and salaries, working hours, shift bonuses, vacation days, Christmas and holiday bonuses and much more.
- The collective agreement complements the employment contract and improves the legal regulations in favor of the union members.
- Because only those who are members of a trade union are entitled to the collective agreement! The current strikes at Amazon want to achieve a collective agreement between the employer and ver.di.

- Collective agreements (“Układ zbiorowy pracy”) are possible, but rather rare in Poland. All workers, no matter if they are members of the union or not, are entitled to the collective agreement. Collective agreements in Poland can regulate the same issues as in Germany.

→ TALK TO US, IF YOU WANNA KNOW MORE ABOUT HOW WE CAN ACHIEVE BETTER WAGES AND BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS AT AMAZON IN GERMANY, POLAND AND ELSEWHERE!



**"WE NEED TO SEE THE COMMON INTEREST AS WORKERS IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES AND MUST NOT FOCUS ON THE DIFFERENCES THAT DIVIDE US!"**

[CHRISTIAN KRÄHLING, AMAZON WORKER IN BAD HERSFELD AND CO-FOUNDER OF AWI, 1977-2020]

## **WHAT ARE OUR DEMANDS?**

### **(1) MORE MONEY!**

We demand wages that reflect Amazon's profit gains and rising inflation. Furthermore, we want wages that ensure sufficient pensions in the future and we want to close the growing wage gap between Eastern and Western Europe.

### **(3) LESS WORK!**

We demand less pressure to perform and less stress, as well as shorter working hours with full wage compensation for better health. In Poland, but also in German delivery stations, workers have to work 10.5 hours. That is simply too much!

### **(2) WORKPLACE DEMOCRACY!**

We demand more participation in the design of workplaces and the use of digital technologies in the labour process, so that only technical innovations are introduced in our interests. We are the most affected by this and have the experience to organise it in the best way possible. We must have a real say over every change in the labor process.

### **(4) SAFE JOBS!**

We demand an end to temporary work, fixed-term contracts, bogus self-employment along the entire Amazon supply chain. Without secure employment, not only do you not have a secure future, but managers have more power over you. That has to end!



## **GET IN CONTACT WITH US**

### **E-MAIL:**

[awi@riseup.net](mailto:awi@riseup.net)

### **BLOG:**

<https://amworkers.wordpress.com/>

### **X:**

<https://twitter.com/AmazonWorkersIn>

### **FACEBOOK:**

<https://www.facebook.com/AmazonWorkersInternational>