

# Let the people vote on Amazon!

written by Stephen Millies

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One hundred thousand schoolchildren in New York City are homeless. Lead paint contaminates thousands of apartments in the city's housing projects.

But both New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and New York State Gov. Andrew Cuomo want to give Amazon.com over \$3 billion for setting up a headquarters in the

New York City borough of Queens.

People are furious. Over 60 people marched inside Amazon's 34th Street bookstore in Manhattan on Nov. 26. Labor leaders protested the giveaway to viciously anti-union Amazon on Nov. 28 in City Hall Park.

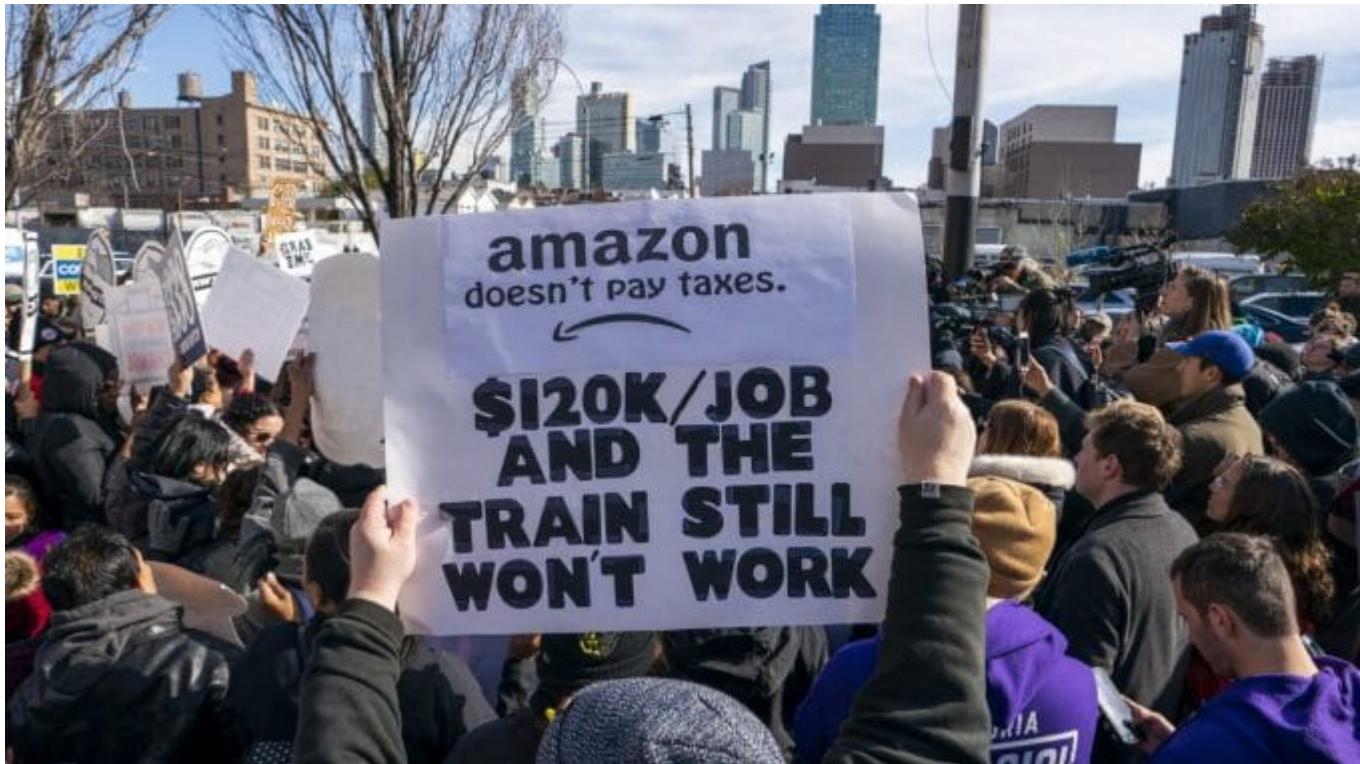
The same day, community groups, including Make The Road While Walking, protested in Long Island City near the proposed site for the headquarters. One hundred people came out in the pouring rain. (Queens Chronicle, Nov. 29)

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos is the richest man in the world, with a \$138 billion fortune. Let him keep a billion dollars and his remaining stash could still give \$500 to every family in Africa.

De Blasio and Cuomo claim that Amazon will bring jobs to New York City. Is Bezos going to set up a hiring hall in the nearby Queensbridge Houses, the largest housing project in the U.S.?

Don't bet on it. In 2014, 24 percent of Amazon's "laborers" in its warehouses were Black and 12 percent were Latinx. But only 10 percent of its "nonlaborer workforce" — which includes almost all the headquarters jobs — were Black or Latinx. (Seattle Times, Aug. 14, 2015)

What Amazon is guaranteed to bring to Queens is more jacked-up rents, which are already a median \$2,450 per month in Long Island City. (Gothamist.com)



### **Over 700,000 jobs lost**

Long Island City was once a center of light industry with 50,000 factory workers. When the Swingline company shut down its stapler plant there in 1999, close to 500 members of Teamsters Local 808 lost their jobs, despite a valiant struggle led by the local's secretary-treasurer, Chris Silvera.

But then New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani — now a Trump lawyer — wasn't sad at all. "The city comes out of this quite well," he declared. (New York Times, Jan. 17, 1989)

Sixty years ago there were 980,000 manufacturing jobs in the Big Apple, many of them in union shops. At least 750,000 of them were destroyed.

It wasn't just automation and runaway businesses that committed this crime. Zoning changes also cost jobs. Landlords and the banks that own their mortgages can

charge much higher rents for office space and luxury housing than for manufacturing lofts.

Amazon wants zoning changes, too. Under the act setting up New York State's Urban Development Corporation, Jeff Bezos, the 138 Billion Dollar Man, can ignore city zoning laws.

The UDC was supposed to build affordable housing. It was passed by the Empire State's Legislature in 1968 after Black rebellions erupted coast-to-coast following Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination.

Andy Cuomo's daddy — the late New York governor and liberal saint, Mario Cuomo — spent billions of UDC money to build more prisons than any other governor in U.S. history.

De Blasio's and Cuomo's giveaway deal with Amazon has found almost universal condemnation, even from other elected officials.

Congresswoman-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, whose district is located in Queens and the Bronx, isn't an Amazon fan either. She tweeted, "From Minnesota to NYC, everyday people all over the country are organizing to resist Amazon's predatory practices on working-class communities." (Politico, Nov. 22)

Tens of thousands of Black voters in Florida and Georgia had their ballots destroyed in the recent midterm elections. The proposed Amazon giveaway being railroaded by Cuomo and de Blasio is just as anti-democratic.

We need the \$3 billion going to billionaire Bezos for housing, schools and transit. Let the people vote on this giveaway in a referendum. The fight against the rotten Amazon deal has just begun.

*The writer was employed for years at Amtrak's Q interlocking tower, on the west*

*end of Sunnyside Yard, behind the Swingline plant.*

