

Rosa Parks vs. Amazon

written by Stephen Millies
February 5, 2021



An Amazon fulfillment center in Staten Island, New York. A similar facility in Bessemer, Alabama, is to voting on unionization.

The labor of Amazon workers during the COVID-19 disaster has been absolutely essential. [At least 20,000](#) of them have caught the coronavirus while working through the pandemic.

Without any labor of his own, Amazon boss [Jeff Bezos added another \\$13 billion](#) to his fortune on the single day of July 20, 2020, the month before [Bezos took away](#) his employees' \$2 per hour hazard pay. Meanwhile, [the Bezos fortune](#) has swollen to \$191.8 billion as of this Feb. 4.

Amazon workers are fighting back. Over 2,000 Amazon workers have signed union cards at the company's huge Bessemer, Ala., fulfillment center, just outside Birmingham.

They want to be represented by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Workers Union. It's part of the 1.3 million member strong United Food and Commercial Workers International Union.

The warehouse workers are sick of being constantly monitored like they are machines. Even going to the bathroom can be cause for being harassed by management. They want the \$2 pay cut restored.

Amazon is spending millions of dollars to fight the organizing drive. Bezos knows that if the Bessemer workers win a union contract, a million other Amazon workers will want one too. Mail-in balloting for the union representation election begins Feb. 8.

The union drive is moving forward in the spirit of Rosa Parks. The Black seamstress sparked the 382-day-long Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott by refusing to give up her seat to a white man on Dec. 1, 1955.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King started his journey for justice with the bus boycott. It would take him to Memphis, Tenn., where he would be assassinated on April 4, 1968. He was there supporting the city's striking sanitation workers.

Bombingham

The Birmingham, Ala., area was the steel center of the South. Tens of thousands were employed by U.S. Steel in the company's steel mills and coal mines there.

In 1930, [13,000 Black miners](#) accounted for the majority of the workers in the local mines. Not all of them were paid.

Until June 1, 1928, U.S. Steel operated the Flat Top mine with the slave labor of 800 Black prisoners. Reparations are still owed for this atrocity. (["Slavery by Another Name,"](#) by Douglas A. Blackmon)

Dr. Angela Davis — who California Gov. Ronald Reagan tried to send to the gas chamber in 1971 on frame-up charges — grew up in Birmingham. It was known in those days as "Bombingham."

Four Black girls were murdered when Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed on Sept. 15, 1963. They were Addie Mae Collins, aged 14; Carol Denise McNair, aged 11; Cynthia Wesley, aged 14; and Carole Robertson, aged 14.

Earlier in 1963, Birmingham Sheriff Theophilus Eugene "Bull" Connor used attack dogs to bite Black people protesting segregation. Forty years later, U.S. troops occupying Iraq for Big Oil used dogs against demonstrators in Baghdad.

Behind Bull Connor was U.S. Steel, which dominated the local economy. The blue chip corporation was put together by Wall Street banker J.P. Morgan. Today's JPMorgan Chase bank has \$3.37 trillion in assets.

U.S. Steel committed more crimes by closing and downsizing its Alabama mills. In 1982, [it fired 3,500 workers](#) at its Fairfield, Ala., works, the largest steel mill in the South.

Just as in the Midwest and Northeast, a tidal wave of factory closings struck the Birmingham area. Many of the jobs destroyed were in unionized plants with union

pay and benefits.

Four hundred workers in Bessemer lost their jobs when [Stockham Pipe and Fittings](#) closed in the late 1990s. The communist leader and union organizer [Hosea Hudson](#) worked there in the early 1930s.

Bull Connor and Jeff Bezos

Jeff Bezos is walking in the footsteps of J.P. Morgan and Bull Connor in trying to crush the organizing drive at the Bessemer warehouse. The \$190 billion boss wants to stop workers from mailing in their ballots for union representation.

Isn't that what the Trump campaign tried to do in the presidential election? The resistance of postal workers and their unions stopped Trump's sabotage.

Mailing in ballots isn't just a matter of health during the pandemic, even though it's safer than waiting in line to vote. Bezos wants workers to vote in person so Amazon will have one more chance to bully them.

Amazon is spending millions to try to defeat the union drive. Anti-union banners decorate the Bessemer warehouse.

Workers are urged to visit a slick company website that uses the lying slogan "Do it without dues." Many workers want to do it without Bezos, who even took away their leave time during the pandemic.

Bezos announced plans to give up his CEO title in order to spend more time on space rockets. He should be sent to pick orders instead.

Management even posted anti-union leaflets in the bathroom stalls. This isn't free speech. It's intimidation that should be outlawed.

Amazon has [brought in Harry Johnson](#), a former member of the National Labor

Relations Board, to help stop the union. Johnson is a member of the Morgan Lewis law firm that specializes in union busting.

Whatever the results of the upcoming representation election, Amazon workers will continue to fight for justice. Their struggle is an inspiration to millions of other workers employed by Walmart, Home Depot and other chain stores.

Henry Ford was forced to sign a union contract. So will Jeff Bezos.

