

Amazon staff in Coventry to strike for four days including Black Friday

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More than 1,000 Amazon workers at the online retailer's Coventry warehouse are to go on strike for four days next month, including on the busy Black Friday sales day. The action was announced as the GMB union said the company "must urgently reconsider its priorities", denouncing a planned pay rise for UK workers announced this week as "little comfort to the thousands of Amazon workers facing poverty pay, unsafe working conditions and workplace surveillance". The strikes will take place on 7, 8 and 9 November, and on 24 November – which is Black Friday, the online shopping bonanza. Amazon said on Monday that minimum starting pay for warehouse workers would rise to £11.80 an hour, from £11 an hour, on 15 October and then increase again to a minimum £12.30 an hour in April. The next level of workers, who receive £12 an hour, will get a pay rise of 50p next week and then an increase to £13 an hour in April – giving a minimum pay rise across hourly paid workers of £1 an hour by the spring. The company said the increase would cost it £170m and mean Amazon's minimum starting pay would have risen by 20% in two years, as it tries to attract 15,000 seasonal workers to help pick and pack Christmas presents. The Amazon UK country manager, John Boumphrey, said the company was "proud to offer [staff] competitive wages and benefits, as well as fantastic opportunities for career development, all in a safe and modern work environment". Nevertheless, Rachel Fagan, a GMB organiser, said: "This is our members' response to the failure of Amazon bosses to listen." Fagan said the latest strike plans would bring the total number of days lost to industrial action at Amazon's Coventry warehouse to nearly 30. In January, workers at the site – who have complained that they have been treated "like robots" – began a strike, the first time the corporation has faced industrial action in the UK. "This is an unprecedented and historic moment with low-paid workers taking on one of the world's most powerful corporations," Fagan said. "Coventry is the beating heart of Amazon's distribution network; strike action here on Black Friday will ripple throughout the company's UK logistics. As Black Friday looms, Amazon must urgently reconsider their priorities or risk strike action causing widespread disruption to customers and the public." The strike action has been announced before a gathering of workers, unions, regulators, policymakers and campaigners from at least 20 countries in Manchester later this month. They plan to coordinate action to challenge Amazon on its treatment of workers, communities and the environment. The first Make Amazon Pay summit on 27 and 28 October is being co-convened by UNI Global Union, a federation of unions, and activists' alliance Progressive International. The agenda will include discussions on subjects such as the warehouse worker protection legislation in the US, Barcelona's Amazon tax and Spain's riders' law, as well as the antitrust case recently filed by the US Federal Trade Commission and legislation such as the EU's digital markets act. Confirmed participants include Yolanda Díaz, Spain's labour

minister, the US senator Bernie Sanders, Paul Nowak, the general secretary of the UK's Trades Union Congress, and Sharon Graham, the general secretary of Unite.