

Amazon UK could be forced to recognise union as GMB wins right to hold ballot

Publication Date: 2024-04-19

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Section: Technology

Tags: Amazon, Retail industry, Internet, Trade unions, news

Article URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/apr/19/amazon-uk-recognise-union-gmb-ballot-coventry-warehouse>



Amazon could be forced to recognise a trade union for the first time in the UK after members of the GMB at the internet retailer's Coventry warehouse were granted permission to hold a legally binding ballot. The Central Arbitration Committee (CAC), the independent statutory body that adjudicates on collective bargaining rights, has ruled that a vote should be held at the site to test support for union recognition. A win would give the GMB the right to discuss terms and conditions such as pay, hours and holidays with Amazon. The union has held a series of strikes at the Coventry unit since January last year, demanding a pay rise to £15 an hour and a seat round the table in negotiations with management. Amanda Gearing, a GMB senior organiser, said: "From day one of GMB's fight for union rights at Amazon it has been a modern-day David and Goliath battle. One year on this is a truly historic moment as workers stand up against the company's relentless anti-union propaganda." The union withdrew an application for statutory union recognition to the CAC last year, accusing Amazon of drafting in more than 1,000 extra staff members to skew the decision – something the retailer has denied. After a concerted recruitment campaign at the vast warehouse, the GMB made a second application last month, believing it had signed up more than half the staff. In a decision statement issued on Thursday, the CAC said it had not found that 50% of workers were members – which could have prompted it to impose recognition immediately – but accepted the GMB's bid for a ballot to be held. The detail of the watchdog's statement underlined the tensions between union and employer, with Amazon accusing the GMB of making "extremely serious and untrue accusations", with the "ulterior motive" of trying to influence the CAC panel. The CAC will appoint an independent person to carry out the vote, which would then be expected to happen within 20 working days. To secure recognition, the GMB will need to win a majority of support in the ballot. The "yes" voters must also represent at least 40% of the workers on site. The CAC's case manager, who took evidence from the union and Amazon, found that the GMB currently represents 35.62% of the 3,088 workers in the proposed bargaining unit, suggesting the union has a fight on its hands. Amazon said its employees have always had the choice of whether or not to join a union. A spokesperson said: "We regularly review our pay to ensure we offer competitive wages and benefits. Our minimum starting pay has increased to £12.30 and £13 an hour depending on location, that's a 20% increase over two years and 50% since 2018. We also work hard to provide great benefits, a positive work environment and excellent career opportunities."