

A new group thinks Amazon is 'too big to govern' and wants to lead the resistance

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In 2017, as cities and states including Philadelphia and Delaware built out lavish incentive packages and sales pitches in hopes of luring Amazon's second headquarters, a resistance emerged.

Critics worried about the displacement of residents, the company's surveillance-heavy labor practices, and the logic of offering billions of dollars in financial incentives to a company owned by one of America's richest men. Organizers eventually succeeded in pushing Amazon out of one of its chosen locations: Long Island City, Queens.

It was an early sign of the backlash against Amazon, a corporation that had long enjoyed an image as a trailblazing disruptor.

The nascent movement to hold Amazon accountable gained momentum this week when a grassroots coalition, focused on issues ranging from labor rights and [climate change](#) to digital surveillance, launched an organization called Athena.

Athena, the group said, aims "to stop Amazon's increasing stranglehold on our economy, democracy, people, and planet."

Amazon is projected to have \$238 billion in sales this year. It employs 750,000 people. Its CEO, Jeff Bezos, is one of the richest people in the world.

The coalition, backed in part by billionaire George Soros, includes some national organizations with a Philadelphia presence, such as worker-organizing group Jobs with Justice, Showing Up for Racial Justice, and the Walmart accountability project United for Respect.

Athena partners call the effort a David vs. Goliath situation. The

coalition is raising \$15 million for its first three years, the *New York Times* reported.

Athena's launch comes as reports and investigations continue to indicate dangerous working conditions for Amazon employees and contractors responsible for the speedy and convenient delivery the corporation is known for—and as fledgling groups of workers, mostly low-wage warehouse staff, are starting to take public action against their employer.

On Monday, workers at an Amazon warehouse on Staten Island that employs more than 2,500 delivered a list of demands, signed by 600 workers, to management. Among them: longer break times, since most of their closely monitored 15-minute break is spent walking to and from the break room in the massive warehouse, and free transportation to the warehouse, as some commute two or three hours to work.

Earlier this fall, 60 workers at a delivery center near the Minneapolis airport staged their second walkout, demanding higher wages for night shift workers and weight restrictions on boxes. A group of workers in Sacramento, Calif., protested the firing of a [worker](#) who went one hour over her bereavement leave after her mother-in-law died.

Amazon's office workers, like their peers at Google and Microsoft, also have organized. In the first white-collar Amazon walkout, more than 1,500 "Amazonians" protested their employer's impact on the environment.

The Philadelphia area is home to several Amazon warehouses, including a recently opened location in West Deptford that the company says employs more than 1,500, another in King of Prussia, and a "Prime Now" warehouse in Philadelphia's University City neighborhood.

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