

# Yes or No? Amazon union vote gets underway in New York

March 26 2022, by Juliette Michel

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Workers gather after casting their vote over whether or not to unionize, outside an Amazon warehouse in Staten Island on March 25, 2022.

Under hazy skies and in the calm of morning, workers waited patiently in line outside the JFK8 warehouse Friday for a say on whether to

establish Amazon's first US labor union.

The six-day election at the Staten Island warehouse, overseen by US officials, opens the polls to the facility's 5,000 workers for five hours each morning and then again in the evening for another five-hour round.

Led by former and current workers, Amazon Labor Union (ALU) qualified for a [vote](#) on unionization after obtaining signatures from 30 percent of the workforce.

But majority support will be needed if Amazon is to have its first union since the company was established in 1994.

Most of the workers who spoke with AFP shortly after the polls first opened Friday were not in favor of the campaign.

"The pay is more than [minimum wage](#), we have benefits like [health insurance](#) from day one, and if I need something, I go directly to my manager," said Georgina Aponte, who was voting no.

Each morning, Aponte, 40, takes a ferry, a subway and two buses from her Bronx home to Amazon. The trip takes two hours each way.

"I like working here," she said.

Others expressed sympathy with the goals of the union, but skepticism about the group's unproven track record.

"I give them a lot of credit for doing what they're doing," said Vinny T., before adding, "I think we have more to lose than gain."

The Amazon job is "not that difficult," said the 57-year-old, who has worked in other unionized companies before.



A leaflet is discarded as workers make their way to cast their vote over whether or not to unionize, outside an Amazon warehouse in Staten Island on March 25, 2022.

### **Company texts Vote 'NO'**

Another worker, Angel Arce, said he is not crazy about the fact that Amazon's pay scale does not boost wages after three years.

But "they are not experienced," Arce said of the union.

Natalie Monarrez came to vote holding a sign that read "I joined ALU, I left ALU, I'm voting NO."

Monarrez, who has worked for Amazon for five years, joined the campaign in May 2021 shortly after the group formed, but gave up on the ALU in January.

"We absolutely need a union," Monarrez said.

"We're working for the richest man on the planet, literally," Monarrez said of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, who sits near the top of Forbes' billionaire list.

"The least they can do is give us a living wage and at least address the issues like harassment, discrimination, ageism, lack of promotions, lack of opportunity," she said.

But Monarrez said workers need an "experienced national union," not a "small independent union that's run by boys who have no experience."

At a nearby bus stop, separated by the warehouse fence-line, stood Christian Smalls, the president of the ALU, who had been on hand since 7 am.





Amazon union leader Christian Smalls waits as workers cast their vote over whether or not to unionize, outside an Amazon warehouse in Staten Island on March 25, 2022.

Smalls, 33, was fired in March 2020 after organizing a campaign to demand [personal protective equipment](#) during the height of Covid-19.

He dismissed the criticism over his track record.

Large national unions "had 28 years to do something," he said.

If workers are waiting for an established group to come along, "they are going to wait a long time," he added.

Smalls said he is hopeful about the vote and about a second election at another Amazon facility in Staten Island next month.

The company has been holding meetings with [workers](#) in an effort to stay union-free.

"They are telling us to vote no," said a young male worker who has sat for 30-minute weekly meetings the last three weeks.

The worker, who did not want to give his name, also has received "No" texts from the company, as well as a call from the ALU.

"They were fair," the [worker](#) said of the [union](#), adding that he voted "yes."

The vote count is expected to start on March 31 and could take as long as several days.

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Citation: Yes or No? Amazon union vote gets underway in New York (2022, March 26) retrieved 23 April 2024 from

<https://techxplore.com/news/2022-03-amazon-union-vote-underway-york.html>

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