

Amazon.com workers in Delaware to hold union election

December 18 2013, by Jay Greene

A second front has opened in Amazon.com Inc.'s battle with unions - this one in the United States.

A small group of equipment maintenance and repair technicians at Amazon's Middletown, Del., warehouse has successfully filed a petition earlier this month to hold elections in January. For the past several months, Amazon has been battling German workers. On Monday, more than 1,000 members of German's Ver.di union, who don't have a contract, walked off the job at three Amazon warehouses there to protest their pay.

On Dec. 6, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers filed a union election petition with the National Labor Relations Board. The union, which also represents tens of thousands of Boeing employees, needed support from at least 30 percent of the 30 workers that it is hoping to represent in contract negotiations with Amazon.

Machinists spokesman John Carr wouldn't disclose the number of workers who petitioned to hold the election, which will take place Jan. 15.

"As an organization, our standard rule of thumb is that we tend to require two-thirds (support before filing a petition) because things are going to happen between now and that January election date," Carr said.

The workers' primary grievances, Carr said, are arbitrary job classifications, promotion and vacation policies.

"There's no rhyme or reason to how the company applies policy," Carr said.

Bloomberg BusinessWeek first reported the news of the union election in Delaware.

Amazon has staunchly fought unionization efforts over the years, and company spokeswoman Mary Osako said "we ... do not believe there is a need for third-party representation" at the Delaware warehouse.

"Amazon's culture and business model are based on rapid innovation, flexibility and open lines of direct communication between managers and associates," Osako said in a statement.

The company has no desire to seek union approval for workplace changes that could make operations more efficient. Last year, for example, Amazon spent \$775 million to acquire Kiva Systems, which makes robots that help automate picking items from vast warehouses. A union could try to negotiate the implementation of those robots.

Osako said that the union is seeking to represent a small fraction of the 1,500 employees at the Delaware facility. She added that Amazon provides "competitive wages and comprehensive benefits" as well as bonuses and stock awards and pays 95 percent of tuition fees for employees.

Even though the number of workers seeking representation is small, Amazon is gearing up for the fight. It has retained Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, a labor law firm that has battled with unions in the past.

Even if the [workers](#) form a union, they'll still have a tough fight to win a contract. Despite some unionization efforts over the years, none of the roughly 110,000 Amazon employees work under a union contract.

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Citation: Amazon.com workers in Delaware to hold union election (2013, December 18)
retrieved 29 January 2023 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-12-amazoncom-workers-delaware-union-election.html>

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