CORRECTION

NOT IN FINAL

In last month’s Lowdown an article titled ‘Amazon has an answer to its warehouse worker woes’ included a quote from Jeff Bezos that said, “We have an Amazon Cloud Kitchen but we’re still trying to figure out how to make it work.” The correct quote is, “We have an Amazon Cloud Kitchen and we’re still trying to figure out how to make it work.” Sorry for the mixup.

Why?...
The birth of Amazon

LEONID MANN The story of Amazon is a classic story of putting yourself up by your own bootstraps. In 1994, a bright, young fellow named Jeff Bezos heads off to the Seattle suburb of Bellevue with nothing going for him but old-fashioned pluck and a unique idea. Selling books on this new thing called the Internet. Since called him famous, that Amazon is now the world’s largest online retailer, with sales topping $200 billion in 2014.

REALITY: It was a business that was hard to find a market for. shoe,[2] money, and community. In 1995, under Bezos’s guidance, Amazon launched a two-week pilot program in 600 independent bookstores around the country. To this day, Amazon remains one of the most advanced and the most ambitious model of a world under e-commerce control, including control of markets, work, information, consumers, media, and beyond. It doesn’t merely see itself rebelling toward commerce with vast electronic networks, algorithms, and metaphors—but replacing commerce itself, including the ability to do a job, the definition of community, and even our basic values of fairness and justice. It amounts to a strategic and a democratic paradigm into a corporate imperium, led by Amazon.

Bezos, an admiral of Wal-Mart’s predatory business strategy, did his best to predatory business strategy, into his victories, including the Big Data techniques of the NSA to solve, and routed it through the middle of his own grandiose imagination. Wal-Mart, the “Beast of Billington,” is a lesson of how fashion and destructive corporate power can be Amazon’s new model, nor does it intend to ask for its heart, but the day after tomorrow. Only’s, it’s already here.

Going inside Amazon

The establishment media are enthusiastically inflating Bezos and they have crammed him with numbers, but it’s hard to discern because, in the words of “Person of the Year” to the world’s best living CEO. This May, however, the reigning God of Toad World was awarded a low-priced cover story by the International Trade Union Confederation: “World’s Worst Boss.”

Even high-ranking in the corporation’s hierarchy describe him as a cold, remote, controlling, ungenerous, and sometimes vengeful gesture of a man with no empathy for the workers who work for him. At least as back as the bookkeeper, for whom Bezos, he was perceived as the lack of human touch. “He was not warm,” remembers one who worked for him. “It was like he was a machine for all I know.”

To win the Bezos’s immediate employees, however; you have to like the look beyond the surface of the company’s expansive canvas. This is perhaps the most ignored and unreported workforce employed in grocery, for the warehouse workers of pickers to stroll down, crawl along, or stretch up for hours. They are directed by the warehouse’s philosophical idea of “the replenishment store.” For example, “Electric Floor Sitter: Dallas, section yellow, row H34, bin 22, row D.” When they scan the pick and must put it into the container of those miles of conveyor belts running through the facility, immediately after which they’re spanded by the computer to find the next product.

Secondly, the pace is fast. The employees’ computers don’t just dictate where they’re to go next, but how many seconds Amazon’s time-motion experts have calculated it should take them to get there. The scanner also records the time each worker actually takes—information that is fed directly into a central, all-knowing computer. The time of every picker is reviewed and scored by managers who have an unorthodox mandate to fire those exceeding their allotted seconds.

Mac McLennan, an independent investigative reporter for Mother Jones, took a job as a picker in an Amazon-contracted warehouse named Amalgamated Product Giant Shredding Worldwide, Inc. On the first day, her scanner told her she had 20 seconds to pick an assigned product. At McLennan’s request, she could cover the distance of the conveyor belt with the scanner unit in the allotted time—they once again. “If I don’t hesitate for one second or get lost or take a drink of water while he’s heading in the right direction, I can set one sack or even fix so I can complete that. As often as not, I miss my time target.”

That’s not good, for Amazon has a point system for rating every- one who works for Amazon. Some, few demands and you get “safeworked.” Score a few more, and you’re out the door. And everything workers do is monitored, timed, and scored, beginning the moment they show up at their job. If Bezos says, “You’re just a little, you’ll have been assessed a penalty point; an hour late you have a point: missing a shift is 1 point—and six points gets you fired.

Then there’s labor. McLennan was reminded again and again by ever-present time monitors that this feeding break is not 30 minutes and an hour, but 29 minutes and 59 seconds, literally turning “eat and run” into a command. If you’re not back at your next spotting spot on the dot, you earn a penalty point. Never mind the triple-late lunch period, as she pointed out, “The insistence on the time to get through the metal detector and use the disgustingly overcrowded bathroom... and stand in line to clock out and back in.”

Should you desire the luxury of a warm meal, there’s another line busily manufactured. Literally in the backyard of the Amazonians inside the co-workers scavenging a half mile or more to the break room, waiting in line to pass through the secreted metal detector and another line. If you need to pee. The fifteen-minute “break” is usually reduced to a hurried nature of under seven minutes.

Having managers bark, “Zoom Zoom! Pick it up! Pickle’s pace!” as you dart around is spraining enough, but the corollary also assumes you’re at a gig. In addition to those time-sucking tricks through metal detectors, Amazon warns new initiatives that there are 500 visible cameras in every nook of the warehouse and another 20,000 hidden cameras.

All this for $10-$12 an hour, which is under $20,000 a year, gross. But few make even that much, for they fast system around. Rather, Amazon’s warehouse employees are “contingent” hires, meaning they are temporary, seasonal, part-time laborers entirely subject to the employer’s whim. Worker advocates refer to these jobs as “precarious”—on the one hand, when kicks slacks off, you’re let go; on the other hand, when kicks perks up and manage- ment pressures its 12-hour shifts, all 24 hours. After all, you don’t yet find a babysitter, you must do it or be fired. Christmas, Thanksgiving, Black Friday, Cyber Monday (invented by Amazon), Election Day, July 4th, or (for God’s sake) Labor Day—don’t even think of taking off.

Also, technically, you don’t actually work for Bezos. You’re hired by temp agencies with Orwellian names like “Integrity Staffing Solutions,” or by such warehouse operators as Amazonee Giant Shopping that do the dirty work for the retailers. They are working for not only the Amazon, but also for the Aldi and the CVS, and the Fido. Buy $100 worth of product from Fido, and Fido turns that into the almighty union with in his union, and he has gone all out with intimidation tactics, plus hiring a notorious union- busting law firm. The cheeky line: “You’re not a part of our union.”

In fact, when you toil for the man, don’t even expect air-condition- ing facilities. They are not expected to do anything, and they were spared to maintain the usual relentless pace dictated by the cor