

5. Amazon's fragile neoliberal Fordism and the challenges for labor organizing in Canada

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INTRODUCTION

Amazon's presence in Canada has become increasingly significant both within the shifting economy of Canada since the company opened its first fulfillment center there (in Ontario) in 2011, as well as politically and socially in terms of the struggles by Amazon workers across Canada that have emerged. E-commerce now represents 11.5 percent of all retail purchases in 2024, and a market valued at \$52 billion CAD (Landmark Global, 2024). As noted by the editors in Chapter 1, Amazon in Canada has by far the largest market share in the e-commerce market in the US's northern neighbor. As of Q1 2025, the company operates 75 facilities across Canada, including 23 fulfillment centers, 45 delivery stations, and six outbound sortation centers (MWPVL, 2025). It employs 46,000 full- and part-time workers directly, excluding delivery service partners (DSPs), which are formally independent but work exclusively for and are controlled by Amazon, whose numbers often surpass direct hires (Amazon Canada, 2025).

Amazon is not just dominating the e-commerce market but is shifting the terrain of workers' rights and their ability to challenge the unjust work conditions produced by Amazon's model of "fast and free" shipping. In April 2024, Amazon workers made history at a delivery station DXT4 on the outskirts of Montreal, Quebec, as they became the first certified union at Amazon in Canada, and also the first union to begin bargaining a collective agreement. Amazon's management also made history when it announced on January 22, 2025 that it would shut all of its Quebec facilities, clearly in response to the successful union campaign. If Amazon had failed to reach an agreement with the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN), Quebec's Labour Code would have forced arbitration—unlike in Staten Island at the JFK8 fulfillment center, where Amazon has delayed bargaining to weaken the union certified in

2022. Such a legal constraint would have been a serious setback to Amazon's anti-union strategy, making its sudden closure of the Laval delivery station appear retaliatory.

As the world's second largest private employer, Amazon's move sends a clear warning to workers and unions in Canada, the US, and Europe—organizing will not be tolerated. The timing is notable, following strikes by Amazon workers in New York and Los Angeles on December 19, 2024. The closures' impact extended far beyond Quebec. In North Carolina, soon after the closure, three-quarters of Amazon workers at a Garner fulfillment center—2,447 against versus 829 in favor—voted down unionizing with CAUSE after a virulent anti-union campaign. Amazon's willingness to abandon investments and infrastructure underscores its commitment to blocking unionization, preserving tight control over labor, and protecting its “fast and free” shipping model. Yet, the attempt to block unionization continues to face challenges from workers in Canada. Unifor's subsequent victory on July 11, 2025 marked the first successful Amazon union certification in British Columbia, consisting of about 300 workers at the Delta fulfillment center. Amazon's initial legal appeal was unsuccessful though it continues to fight the certification; it will face mandatory mediation and perhaps arbitration if it loses again and fails to bargain in good faith.

What remains apparent is that Amazon's efforts to project its power as the world's second largest private employer only behind Walmart and management practices across borders to secure markets must contend with the ways in which its model is contingent upon specific regulatory contexts that are produced by social, political, and economic processes across geographies and scales. Amazon develops strategies to limit the constraints on its business model as a result of efforts to regulate and organize Amazon workers varies across geographies. My research therefore asks what kinds of “distribution work spaces” Amazon is constructing in order to ensure its production regime is operationalized outside of its home market in order to both contain costs and increase productivity while ensuring it is not constrained by local or national regulatory frameworks that can inhibit its profitability. Specifically, I examine the workplace strategies that Amazon employs in the context of Canada and specifically in Ontario and Quebec in order to resolve these contradictions embedded within the logistics imperative. Amazon's logistics operations in Canada demonstrate how Amazon endeavors to resolve a critical operational puzzle: namely, how to overcome the limitations and threats posed to Amazon's model to circulate goods across space with speed and efficiency within various and diverse subnational institutional settings even within a common country.

More specifically, the chapter illustrates how Amazon as a corporation seeks to navigate its territorialization through strategies that would limit Amazon organizing becoming embedded within frameworks that could shape or steer