



HAL
open science

A Struggle for Bodies and Souls: Amazon Management and Union Strategies in France and Italy

Francesco S. Massimo

► **To cite this version:**

Francesco S. Massimo. A Struggle for Bodies and Souls: Amazon Management and Union Strategies in France and Italy. Jake Alimahomed-Wilson; Ellen Reese. The Cost of Free Shipping: Amazon in the Global Economy, Pluto Books, pp.129-144, 2020, Wildcat, 9780745341484. 10.2307/j.ctv16zjhcj.15 . hal-04512742

HAL Id: hal-04512742

<https://hal.science/hal-04512742>

Submitted on 20 Mar 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Public Domain

Chapter Title: A Struggle for Bodies and Souls: Amazon Management and Union Strategies in France and Italy

Chapter Author(s): Francesco Massimo

Book Title: The Cost of Free Shipping

Book Subtitle: Amazon in the Global Economy

Book Editor(s): Jake Alimahomed-Wilson, Ellen Reese

Published by: Pluto Press. (2020)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv16zjhcj.15>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>. Funding is provided by Knowledge Unlatched Select 2020: HSS Frontlist.



Pluto Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Cost of Free Shipping*

8

A Struggle for Bodies and Souls: Amazon Management and Union Strategies in France and Italy

Francesco Massimo

At the end of 2017, the press, the public, and the labor movement raised concerns about the frantic work pace, insane corporate culture, and deplorable working conditions at Amazon. What, then, has prevented labor unrest among Amazon's workers? To address this question, I interviewed and talked with Amazon workers. I also worked in a French Amazon Fulfillment Center (FC) as a temporary worker for two months, in July 2018 and October 2019, and in an Italian FC for four months, from May to August 2019. Drawing on this ethnographic and comparative research, this chapter provides insights on Amazon management and assesses union strategies within the French and Italian contexts.

Amazon has an expansive logistical infrastructure and a large concentration of workers (an FC employs hundreds or thousands of workers). The problem faced by management is how to govern these large hubs; they seek to ensure workers' commitment and acquiescence, hinder workforce unionizing and escape, and take advantage of loopholes in institutional constraints, such as labor regulations, on wage work in order to reduce labor costs and maximize profits. These tasks are particularly challenging in European countries where prior class conflict has institutionalized the relations between unions and corporations.¹ I argue that the company relies on a "corporate hegemony" regime, in order to "obscure and secur[e] the surplus value"² and gain workers' cooperation. In particular, Amazon combines bureaucratic techniques (real time control and performance evaluation) with a particular type of corporate culture³ that depends upon gamification, meritocratic and diversity discourse, corporate welfare, and

The Cost of Free Shipping

soft authoritarianism. As the Marxist sociologist Michael Burawoy describes it, the traditional Fordist hegemonic regime is built on a “compromise,” i.e., the coordination of mutually antagonist interests for instance through collective bargaining.⁴ In contrast, in Amazon’s new “service factories,” the company clearly negates class conflict and union legitimacy. Instead, Amazon’s hegemony is built on the organized fragmentation of any potential antagonistic subjectivity by integrating a distinct combination of coercion, surveillance, and consent in the workplace.

COERCION AND SURVEILLANCE THROUGH THE LABOR PROCESS

Work in Amazon FCs is implicitly based on the three pillars of Taylorism, or scientific management, as defined by Harry Braverman in his classic 1974 work *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.⁵

(1) *The dissociation of the labor process from the skills of the workers:* The labor process is to be rendered independent of craft, traditions, and the workers’ knowledge. Amazon often recruits people without any professional background, or even without work experience in the case of young workers: anyone can have their “chance.” Tasks such as *picking*, *packing*, or *stowing* are so simple that no special skill is required. The technical division of labor is so intense that a few hours are usually enough to train workers to perform these tasks. This allows management to allocate the workforce in terms of organizational needs and in an arbitrary way, favoring some workers instead of others, thus dividing the workforce.⁶

(2) *Separation of conception from execution:* The fragmentation of the labor process into basic tasks implies that workers are merely expected to execute their jobs. Amazon’s introduction of algorithmic management allows managers to plan and distribute work among FCs and, within them, among different departments and tasks. Both workers and managers lose significant autonomy, although that allows managers to naturalize their decisions in front of the workers. Workers do not master the organization of work, nor are they expected to do so. Thus, the organization presents itself as an *algorithmic bureaucracy*.

(3) *Monopoly over knowledge to control each step of the labor process and its mode of execution:* The divorce between conception and execution, however, does not correspond to the separation of mental from manual labor. Quite the opposite. Management is aware of the mental content of work—even

the most basic tasks imply workers' mental activity—and digital devices allow real-time control of work and also permanent flows of information from workers' devices to a centralized system. These devices capture real-time information about each worker on the job. Knowledge about the labor process thus becomes a crucial part of the extraction of value, which is placed strictly in the hands of management.⁷ Such organization of the labor process has two key effects: it decreases the interdependence of workers and reduces workers' autonomous skills and knowledge, thereby allowing management to easily measure each worker's output and labor effort.⁸

COERCION THROUGH THE LABOR MARKET

Low interdependence and deskilling also weakens workers' structural power in the workplace and the labor market. The labor market can be divided in two parts: an external and an internal. In contrast to the Fordist era, today's conditions of the external labor market are completely different. Full employment gave way to mass unemployment. The two FCs I studied were both established in areas that had been enduring a wave of deindustrialization since the 1980s and was greatly affected by the 2008 economic crisis. In the department around the French site, the official unemployment rate was 9.2% in 2006, one year before the FC opened (2007), but jumped to 11.5% in 2011 and to 13.2% in 2016.⁹ When the Italian FC opened in 2011, the unemployment rate was skyrocketing from 2% (2008) to 9.4% (2014) and then stabilized around 6% (2017).¹⁰ In both cases, the unemployment rate was high enough to weaken workers' collective power. Particularly in the years in which the economic crisis was more acute, Amazon appeared to workers and their local communities as an opportunity to escape unemployment. Moreover, Amazon offered a compensation slightly higher than the minimum wage and the promise of a stable job in a big, successful company. However, the realization of such a perspective was not so close at hand, given the split structure of the internal labor market which included both permanent and temporary workers.

Observing the workplace, especially during the peak season, the firm treated these two groups of workers very differently. Amazon logistics performance relies on the presence of this "industrial reserve army" of precarious workers inside the labor process. Temps are recruited through agencies during the peak season and the large majority of them outperform

The Cost of Free Shipping

permanent workers, pushed by the threat of immediate lay-off. Asymmetrical power relations between workers and management are exacerbated for temps. Permanent workers can rely on a relatively strong relation with their co-workers and on a relative high employment protection. In the case of temps, employment relations are much more individualized. The pace of work becomes more intense and surveillance more effective, creating a terrain favorable to opportunism and isolation. Turnover is high and only a small proportion of temps will ever obtain a permanent position, usually after at least six months of temporary contracts. The majority of temps are eventually laid off at the end of the peak season.

Amazon's production regime depends upon this split structure of its internal labor market and labor market conditions. Deskilling and mass unemployment increase the risk of job loss to workers and thus make it easier for managers to exploit them. Even so, management must also legitimize its industrial order and gain workers' consent and active participation. To do this, it must persuade workers that its industrial order is the only possible and desirable option, with no real competing alternative, so that workers come to view their interests as aligned with those of the corporation.

THE MANAGEMENT OF LEGITIMACY: THE DISCOURSES OF COMPANY LEADERSHIP AND CUSTOMER OBSESSION

Amazon's official doctrine is how the firm thinks about itself, its self-representation. The two pillars of Amazon's official doctrine are company leadership and customer obsession, both of which are used to manage its legitimacy among workers. First, Amazon is portrayed to workers as the most efficient e-commerce and logistics company in the world. During recruitment and training, daily meetings (the "brief") or periodic meetings (the "All hands"), workers are informed about the ruthless success of the company and its leadership on sales, employment, productivity, and technology. The company's corporate culture is founded on 14 "leadership principles" which are supposed to govern every choice, from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy; from engineers to warehouse workers, everyone is equal in front of these rules. Other norms which are important for the firm's legitimacy is the triad—safety-quality-productivity. These are the three basic norms that are supposed to govern the labor process. Amazon is presented to the workers as a leader in workplace safety—if the rules are respected, no

workplace accident will occur—and in the quality of the service—deliver on time and with the good article in perfect condition—and productivity. The order of priority is clear: the official discourse establishes that safety “comes first,” followed by quality, and last, productivity. Through these rules, especially the priority given to workplace safety, Amazon presents itself as socially responsible, helping to increase its legitimacy among workers and the broader public. However, the reality at work is quite different, as many workers stress, particularly during the peak season, productivity outranks workplace safety. As I observed, these rules are often used not to protect workers but to increase surveillance of them. Workers must continuously arbitrate between these different imperatives and opposite injunctions, especially safety and productivity. Frequently, workers receive negative feedback because, under the pressure of work, they did not respect a particular safety procedure.

In the building of consent, the algorithm also plays a role: it is an invisible authority that determines the organization of work. Managers rely on algorithms to predict the volume of goods to be handled, in addition to assigning tasks and in the evaluation of workers’ performance. The algorithm does not accomplish these functions automatically but in concert with managers. This lends a technical character to managers’ personal authority, thus fostering the whole legitimacy of the organization of work. Hence, we could define this kind of administration as *algorithmic bureaucracy* or *algorithm-assisted management*.¹¹

If algorithm is presented as the ultimate authority, customer satisfaction is presented as the ultimate goal, in the face of which managers and workers appear to be equal. Management on behalf of customers helps to naturalize managers’ power as an objective constraint and to foster workers’ involvement. Training becomes a key site during which this belief is fostered: a video is shown to new workers which tells the story of a mother who orders a doll for her daughter but, because of a mistake committed by a worker during the labor process, the child receives the wrong doll and cries. Such a video illustrates through an example the importance of quality of work for fulfilling the service promised to customers, as well as the “harmful” consequences of workers’ errors on customers’ psychological well-being. In contrast to other comparable service companies, such as Walmart or Uber, for Amazon the customer is never physically present in the workplace. For this reason, customer satisfaction must be permanently evoked by managers

during briefings. For example, they might declare: “Congratulations! Today we managed to satisfy our customers’ demands.” References to customers are also contained in instructions given to the workers, such as “If you are not sure if a product is damaged, make your decision as if you were the customer who ordered it.” Or they are represented on walls and boards. For instance, the organizational chart of an FC is epitomized by a Maslow-like upside-down pyramid, in which customers are on the top, associates immediately below, followed by a team leader, area managers, operational managers and finally, at the capsized summit, the general manager. Customers are therefore surreptitiously integrated into the labor process by management, although this goal is never fully achieved because of the technical impossibility of this.

Customer obsession in warehouse work is also frequently perceived and dismissed by workers as a clumsily disguised form of management control. However uncertain its assimilation by workers, it is important to stress that unions can also be sensitive to customer obsession: even a traditionally combative union such as the French CGT (*Confédération Générale du Travail*) released flyers during a strike in 2014 in which they affirmed that their action was by no means an action against customers and for this reason trucks would not be blocked by strikers. The last element of legitimation is employment and investments. The company exerts a powerful influence on local communities by stressing its role as a job creator and as an investor. Legitimation provides the company with an official discourse through which it can justify its activity. However, self-representation does not automatically lead to consent. Legitimation means that the industrial order is perceived as the only possible and desirable one. However, management faces the problem of actively eliciting workers’ cooperation in the workplace, and for that consent to be obtained, workers’ interest must appear linked to the interest of the firm.

THE MANAGEMENT OF CONSENT

What distinguishes Amazon’s corporate hegemonic regime from the Fordist hegemonic regime is the central role of management in Amazon and the exclusion of unions from the construction of consent. According to Burawoy, consent spreads from workers’ activity, such as “*making out*,”¹² and from collective bargaining. In contrast, consent is built from the top in

Amazon, through corporate culture, and relies upon the managerialization of labor relations and the exclusion of unions from the workplace.

The management of consent links the interest of the worker to the interest of the company. In order to achieve these goals, the role of management—team leaders, area managers, and operational managers—becomes crucial. The first goal is to render the work meaningful in order to avoid dissatisfaction without renouncing the Taylorization of work, and it is sought through the labor process. The second goal is, borrowing Albert O. Hirschman's terms, to build loyalty, channel voice, and control exit,¹³ and it is pursued through the internal labor market.

HARD WORK, MANDATORY FUN:
CONSENT THROUGH THE LABOR PROCESS

Beyond technocracy and customer obsession, Amazon governs the workplace through a set of norms and activities, which in fact are nothing but rituals to foster workplace identity and workers' investment to their job. The result of these policies, such as gamification and workers' involvement, are the individualization of the employment relation and the breaking of workers' associational power. Workers are asked to actively participate in the organization of work and in the social life of the factory. For instance, they are encouraged to signal any problem and propose changes immediately to managers without a union or any other hierarchical or collective intermediation. Propositions, written on a suggestion board (called by the Japanese-Toyota-ist terms "*Kaizen Board*" or "*Gemba Walk*"), are then selected and evaluated by managers: all receive answers, whether positive or negative. Some propositions are rejected because they are not viable, while others are accepted, and the authors are publicly thanked on another board. In this way, management imposes the organization of work, keeps control of its ordinary functioning and can, sometimes, choose some ideas from workers' propositions. Most of all, they involve workers and make them cooperate in their own exploitation.

The slogan "Work hard, have fun, make history" is an exhortation not only to accomplish tasks successfully and with high performances (professional commitment), but also to mobilize the emotional sphere of workers' experience. This goal is approached through a broad set of practices that aim to improve workers' positive feelings about their work and to boost

The Cost of Free Shipping

workers' cooperation with managerial goals. These practices include the gamification of work, understood not necessarily as the design of tasks in a game-like way but as the staging of a widespread spirit of play. As long as tasks are fragmented in elementary operations, scanners and other computer devices used by workers provide them with immediate feedback on their performance. Instructors train workers partly through the organization of contests and games which encourage more competitive workers to take the lead while leaving at the margins workers which, for any reason, do not "play the game." Team briefings are conceived of and organized as a school class: team leaders and area managers ask questions, cyclically the same, to workers on standard work, quality, and safety rules. After that, ranks are broken and workers chosen for the "fast start," i.e., realizing the first task (picking an article or packing a box) in the shortest time. During work, operators can receive on their device a message of congratulations by their manager or, alternatively negative feedback (several negative feedbacks can lead to the worker being laid off). Workers' behavior is measured along different dimensions (performance, quality, presence at work) and periodically rewarded with "swag," i.e., virtual coins they can spend to purchase Amazon gadgets and products. This system of symbolic rewards lubricates the execution of repetitive, fragmented, elementary tasks.

Another instrument to build consent is the diffusion of a spirit of competition among the workforce: temporary workers compete in order to have more chances to have their contract renewed; team and area managers compete in order to boost their careers. Every actor, whether worker or manager, has an interest in outperforming his or her peers even if, in some cases, such a competitive atmosphere threatens cooperation and fosters opportunism. Workers and managers thus both face competitive constraints. A flagrant example is the "Amazon connection," a daily survey given to the workers in which they answer questions about their satisfaction at work (if they feel respected at work, if their work respects safety rules, etc.). As the workers put it, "it is a way to control managers": managers are responsible for bad results, i.e., low levels of satisfaction. So managers compete to have the best feedback by their workers and workers are given an instrument that is supposed to give them a voice on particular problems. However this form of "domesticated" voice is completely individualized—workers answer questions through their individual account, even if the survey is supposed to

be anonymous—and treatment of these data and the solution to possible problems is not in their hands.

CONSENT THROUGH THE LABOR MARKET

Another way in which workers and managers are under the same pressure involves careers. Workers cannot expect to radically improve their career in Amazon in terms of wage and position. A few of the “associates” become team leaders; becoming a manager is a rare exception. Yet, workers depend on management regarding “horizontal” career moves within the workplace. Workers know that if they behave properly—“work hard, have fun, make history”—and establish good personal relations with their supervisors, they can move from one position to another. Workers seek jobs with less arduous and monotonous tasks such as “problem solver” or “process guide” (though with no wage increase), or they strive to become “temporary” team leader and other forms of individual improvement of their working condition.

What happens to dissatisfied workers? Amazon has an answer for them too. In 2014, the company introduced a “Pay-to-Quit” program, called “*the Offer*,” which is widely used in the United States: at least once a year, but sometimes even more frequently, associates are offered the opportunity to leave the company forever in exchange of €1000–2000 per year worked at Amazon. Referring again to Hirschman’s triad of *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*,¹⁴ we could say that the company encourages dissatisfied workers to *exit* in order to prevent *voice*. Also, unions and collective bargaining do not have any recognized and effective power on this key point of the workplace’s social life.

THE RELATIVE AUTONOMY OF THE WORKPLACE

In contrast to the classic Fordist hegemonic regime, unions are usually excluded from the management of Amazon’s internal labor market. Amazon is fiercely hostile to unions, which the company considers to be intruders. However, such a position toward unions is difficult to maintain in the Western European context, where union presence is stronger than in the U.S., and labor law as well as collective bargaining are still central in employment relations. Progressively, the degradation of working conditions

and pressures from the labor movement set the terrain for union action. In some European countries, where unions are less weak and employment relations are part of the constitutional order, Amazon facilities have been touched by union action, strikes, and industrial conflicts. This was the case in Germany (2013), France (2014), Poland (2015), Italy (2017), and Spain (2018). In France and Italy, Amazon was forced by law and collective action to recognize the presence of unions inside its FCs. Even in those countries, the company goal is to reduce at any cost the influence of collective bargaining on the organization of work.¹⁵ On the other hand, unions are still struggling to coordinate their actions and goals across workplace sections, sector federations, and different national settings.

UNIONS IN FRANCE AND ITALY: BETWEEN COLLECTIVE
BARGAINING AND CONTESTING MANAGERIAL DISCOURSE
AND PRACTICES

In France, where collective bargaining is compulsory at the company level and where every five years, workers' elections are celebrated, union presence is institutionally rooted and almost routinized. All French Amazon FCs are unionized, with different electoral rates among unions at every site. All Amazon employees have their representative bodies regularly elected (in 2011, 2015, and 2019). According to 2019 election results, the main unions are CFDT (*Confédération française démocratique du travail*, a former Catholic moderate union, 28%), *Solidaires* (a radical anarchist union, 25%), CGT (*Confédération générale du travail*, a radical former communist union, 25%), CAT (*Confédération autonome du travail*, known as a "yellow", i.e. non-independent, union, 13%). However, voter turnout remains low and union membership has always been weak (between 5 and 10 percent of warehouse workers), in line with the national average in the private sector in France. Inter-union competition can be very harsh, not only between unions (particularly the former communist CGT and the more business-friendly CFDT), but also inside the organizations themselves. One of the reasons for this harsh competition is the crucial importance of elections: competition in company elections determines the amount of resources and power unions obtain within the company. Union resources are used to maintain the organization and implement cultural and recreational activities with

company funds and contribute to the relative influence of trade unions at the national level.

Surprisingly, Amazon management quickly adapted to this context and have used union divisions to contain their influence. Amazon management either favors one union to the detriment of others, or creates a company union. Amazon explored the first option of pitting unions against each other. It also pursued the latter path when, before professional elections in 2015, management informally encouraged the formation of a yellow union, the CAT, in order to break the union front and have a possible union ally. Finally, the company condoned threats of layoffs among union members and representatives, most recently during the Yellow Vest movement.

Despite management hostility, unions organized actions during the past years. Union strategy focused on health and safety issues, working time, and job classification. Modes of action alternate between episodic walkouts with legal action in labor courts. Strikes have been taking place frequently since 2014, with at least two per year but have never been promoted by all the unions at once and in every FC at the same time, which weakened these actions given the capacity of the company to reroute orders through its vast network. Moreover, strike participation is low: in general no more than a hundred workers walk out. Legal actions intensified and climaxed in the summer of 2019 as ongoing controversies about job classification arose. Unions challenged Amazon's internal system of classification, which is structured on only two levels (simple associates, level T1, and team leader, T3), because it does not respect job classifications established by sector-level collective bargaining.¹⁶ Unions also commissioned studies on working conditions, which reportedly carry high psycho-social risks for workers. On the other hand, unions have been unable to enlarge their scope of action beyond standard FC employees to address the conditions of temporary agency workers which are employed heavily during seasonal peaks of activity. Nor have they been able to deploy a campaign of unionization of workers along Amazon's supply chain, i.e., smaller delivery stations and last mile drivers. This concentration of unions in the core may bring some residual benefit to many FC workers but not solidarity for all.

In Italy, Amazon is slightly younger (2011) than in France (2007), and had its first cycle of industrial conflict in 2017 when a strike took place during Black Friday, which had a strong impact across the media. In contrast to France, collective bargaining at the company level is not compulsory and

The Cost of Free Shipping

Amazon refused to recognize unions as interlocutors for several months after they declared their formation. Regardless, the main three Italian historic unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL plus the right-wing UGL¹⁷) put the corporation under strong public and political pressure with a strike during 2017's Black Friday. Thus management had to capitulate, at least formally, and allow union presence in Italian FCs. Workers' demands focused on health and safety, schedules, and respect from managers, and coalesced in a strike, which was organized and encouraged by unions. At that time, unions had no access to the workplace and workers had no means of expressing their concerns other than by making requests of management or through passive resistance.

After a three months' refusal to negotiate with the unions, two strikes, and government pressure (Ministry of Labor and the local Prefect), the company finally agreed to bargain with the unions. Parts of workers' demands were combined into a collective agreement and approved by a referendum. The main issue was an equal distribution of shifts and working time among workers. Significantly, the company accepted the deal but claimed that the agreement was signed only by workers' representatives and not by union officers. The agreement was presented as a historic win by unions and their national leaders. In a surprising turnaround, it was also publicly endorsed by Amazon Italy's top managers, who claimed to have good relations with the workers and a fruitful dialogue with "workers' representatives" (the word "unions" is carefully avoided).

However, many problems, such as yearly bonuses, job classifications, and health and safety issues remain unresolved. After the first collective agreement, no significant improvement resulted from the negotiations. In the summer of 2019, some Amazon workers, working outside of unions, collected approximately five hundred signatures for a petition. The petition called for better working conditions, particularly in terms of shift scheduling, but it was dismissed by the company and also by the unions, which is quite telling about the difficulties unions are facing in winning the trust of the workers. As in France, temporary workers are completely excluded from union representation and collective bargaining, although they are crucial for the functioning of the whole organization of work.

In contrast to France, as union presence and collective bargaining is protected but not imposed by legally binding norms, unions had to enlarge

their legitimacy and during the strike opted for inter-union cooperation. Moreover, CGIL has been able to organize Amazon's drivers in the last two years and they organized a strike in 2018. In response, Amazon agreed to negotiate some aspects of the organization of work with unions, even though drivers are not Amazon employees but hired by outsourced small delivery firms.

Amazon's crucial battlefield is not in the arena of collective bargaining. Management is instead primarily concerned with gaining control over workers' minds and bodies, and secondarily, focused on behaving strategically once collective bargaining is settled. The company appears to be able to adapt to the institutional context and to take advantage of some parts of it, finding loopholes in labor legislation, unilaterally interpreting (or breaking) collective agreements, exploiting division among unions, and ultimately shielding its corporate regime. In these ways, it continues to exclude unions and workers from decisions on the organization of work. This could happen also at the transnational level, where the creation of a European Workers' Council with advisory prerogatives, is likely to be more a tool in the hands of the company for promoting its reputation than a weapon to improve working conditions and workers' political participation.

NOT THE END OF HISTORY

Far from behaving as a ruthless enemy of unions as it does in the U.S., Amazon in Europe accepts, at least formally, the institutional constraints imposed by unions and labor laws, and takes advantage of legal loopholes in terms of compensation. In the face of this counter-strategy, unions risk being co-opted and becoming part of workplace administration. Nevertheless, Amazon's hegemony is not uncontested. The corporation strives to maintain satisfying levels of productivity in its FCs, but this cannot be taken for granted. Workers' commitment is hard to secure and the workforce does not allow itself to be shaped by management without resistance. Amazon's hegemonic corporate regime cannot eradicate the latent antagonism in production relations, which emerges concretely in workers' account of their life in the workplace, especially when the issues of health, dignity, and respect are commonly evoked. French and Italian unions have been able to break the wall of anti-unionism built by the company. However, their

The Cost of Free Shipping

activities have not yet successfully challenged managerial discourse, namely customer obsession, and all the sets of practices that safeguard corporate hegemony within the workplace. The mechanisms of unconscious consent described above take place in the everyday life of the workplace and are rarely questioned by unions. Unions must contest managerial discourses and workplace practices, and help workers to forge an alternative identity in order to empower workers *vis-à-vis* of management. The only ones who have been adopting a critical stand toward corporate hegemony management is a minority of workers, whether union members or not. Some of them occasionally comment with pessimistic irony on the official discourse of management: “Tomorrow I am not going to work: I am going to Amazon and make history ...”.

Table 8.1 General data on Amazon Fulfillment Centers in France and Italy

	France	Italy
Number of FCs	6	4
Number of FC employees	4700 (+ 3000 temp workers)	2800 (+ 2300 temp workers)
Main unions	CFDT, <i>Solidaires</i> , CGT	CGIL, CISL, UGL
Union membership	5–10%	20% ¹⁸
Absenteeism	>10%	–
Days of strike	>10 (since 2014)	2 (since 2017)

Source: Author's fieldnotes

NOTES

1. Colin Crouch and Wolfgang Streeck (eds.), *Political Economy of Modern Capitalism: Mapping Convergence and Diversity* (London: Sage, 1997); Lucio Baccaro and Chris Howell, *Trajectories of Neoliberal Transformation: European Industrial Relations Since the 1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
2. Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 30.
3. Gideon Kunda, *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006); Danièle Linhart, *La comédie humaine du travail: de la déshumanisation taylorienne à la sur-humanisation managériale* (Toulouse: Érès, 2015).
4. Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent*, p. 120.

A Struggle for Bodies and Souls

5. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).
6. Francesco S. Massimo, "Spettri del Taylorismo. Lavoro e organizzazione nei centri logistici di Amazon," *Quaderni di Rassegna Sindacale* 3 (2019): 85–102.
7. Massimo, 'Spettri del Taylorismo'; Alessandro Delfanti, "Machinic Dispossession and Augmented Despotism: Digital Work in an Amazon Warehouse," *New Media & Society*, December 2, 2019.
8. Regarding employers' ability to deconstruct tasks in order to "easily measure the output of each worker and thus monitor their level of labor effort", see Michael Burawoy and Erik Olin Wright, "Coercion and Consent in Contested Exchange", *Politics & Society* 18(2) (1990): 251–66. Massimo, "Spettri del Taylorismo"; Delfanti, "Machinic Dispossession and Augmented Despotism."
9. The French National Institute of Statistics.
10. The Italian National Institute of Statistics.
11. Francesco S. Massimo, "Burocrazie algoritmiche. Limiti e astuzie della razionalizzazione digitale in due stabilimenti Amazon," in *Etnografia E Ricerca Qualitativa* 1 (2020): 53–78.
12. In the factory studied by Burawoy "making out" was a game played by piece-rate workers on the shop-floor and one of the pillars of workers' consent to their exploitation. Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent*, pp. 48–94.
13. Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
14. *Ibid.*
15. Amazon workers and supporters, "Stop Treating Us Like Dogs! Workers Organizing Resistance at Amazon in Poland," in Jake Alimahomed-Wilson and Immanuel Ness (eds.), *Choke Points: Logistics Workers Disrupting the Global Supply Chain* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), pp. 96–109; Bruno Cattero and Marta D'Onofrio, "Orfani delle istituzioni. Lavoratori, sindacati e le 'fabbriche terziarie digitalizzate' di Amazon," *Quaderni di rassegna sindacale* 1 (2018): 7–28; Jörn Boewe and Johannes Schulten, "The Long Struggle of Amazon Employees," *Laboratory of Resistance: Union Organising in E-Commerce Worldwide*, 2nd ed. (Brussels: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2019).
16. The system of classification included in the sectoral collective agreement recognises workers' skills (for instance, forklift drivers) and better wages. Unions sued the company in front of the commerce-sector labor board in order to align the company's internal classification to the sectoral agreement. Amazon's reaction was to opt out from the commerce sector and apply another sector's collective agreement (transport).
17. *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* is the former Communist and largest trade union in Italy. *Confederazione Italiana Sindacati dei Lavoratori* is the former Catholic and second largest union in Italy. *Unione Italiana del Lavoro* is the former Liberal-Socialist union and third largest union in Italy. *Unione Generale del Lavoro* is the former neo-Fascist union in Italy. Unions did not

The Cost of Free Shipping

precisely declare their membership. We know that in the Italian FC I studied, CISL had around one hundred members, CGIL also one hundred but slightly less than CISL, UGL around fifty members, and UIL around thirty. Considering that the FC's permanent workforce is around 1,600 workers, we can therefore estimate a membership rate of 20 percent, temp workers excluded.

18. Data refer to the only Italian FC with established union presence.