



Amazon brings two distribution centers to southern IL, organized labor protests

September 23, 2016

Amazon Inc., the world's largest online retailer, earlier this month opened the first of two planned distribution centers in the southern Illinois community of Edwardsville. Located in the Gateway and Lakeview commerce centers, the projects are expected to bring more than 1,000 jobs to the area.

But a local road sign popped up, with the words "Shame on Amazon" emblazoned in red and black letters.

The St. Louis-Kansas City Carpenters Regional Council, which, according to the organization's website, represents more than 20,000 members in 34 union locals across Missouri, Kansas and southern Illinois, claimed responsibility for the sign, saying it commissioned it to protest the fact that Amazon apparently had used non-union workers from out of town to install racking and conveyor systems in the two new locations.

Amazon responded that, in fact, the workers in question had been supplied by a contract staffing company, which had made the personnel decisions.

The company also said that some of the construction was done with union labor, through Contegra Construction, which was under contract to perform a variety of improvements using local union workers.

A union spokesman complained about 100 local union workers losing out on the eight-week job.

Chris Edwards, an economist with the Cato Institute who has conducted studies in all 50 states, said that not only should Amazon not have to explain why it didn't hire union workers, but that it also should avoid union intrusion as much as possible.

The sign was a clear example of manipulative union tactics, Edwards said.

“Unions are (monopolies) and coerce organizations, (which) I think are inconsistent with other individual rights,” Edwards said. “Monopoly unions are the denial of freedom of both association and expression.”

Americans today generally don't like and don't want to join unions, Edwards said.

“Unionization in the private sector in the United States has plunged over the years,” Edwards said.

Edwards said private-sector union membership dropped from 30 percent to 6 percent over several decades.

Edwards said the real takeaway from Amazon's Edwardsville expansion is the company's interest in the area at a time when so many other companies are leaving the Prairie State.