

# [***Former Google workers fired for protesting Israel deal file complaint claiming protected speech***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BXN-SH41-JBSS-S192-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

New York (CNN) &#8212; Dozens of former Google workers filed a complaint with the US National Labor Relations Board on Tuesday after they were fired or placed on administrative leave last month for [*protesting*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/18/tech/google-fires-employees-israel/index.html) the company's cloud-computing contract with Israel's government.

The complaint accuses Google of retaliating against the workers for their "protected concerted activity, namely, participation (or perceived participation) in a peaceful, non-disruptive protest that was directly and explicitly connected to their terms and conditions of work."

The workers are seeking reinstatement of their jobs and back pay, according to No Tech for Apartheid, a group made up in part by Google and Amazon workers that organized last month's protest.

A Google spokesperson said in a statement that the protests were "a very clear case of employees disrupting and occupying work spaces, and making other employees feel threatened and unsafe."

"By any standard, their behavior was completely unacceptable - and widely seen as such," the spokesperson said. "We carefully confirmed and reconfirmed that every single person whose employment was terminated was directly and definitively involved in disruption inside our buildings. We are confident in our position and stand by the actions we've taken."

Last month's protests involved employee sit-ins inside Google's offices in New York City and Sunnyvale, California. In Sunnyvale, employees entered the office of Google Cloud CEO Thomas Kurian, according to No Tech for Apartheid.

No Tech for Apartheid [*said last week that 50 Google employees*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/23/tech/google-fires-employees-protest-israel/index.html) were terminated in connection with the protests. The group claimed that some of the workers fired were "non-participating bystanders" and not actively involved in the workplace activism.

A Google spokesperson told CNN last month that the company had investigated the "physical disruption inside our buildings on April 16."

"Our investigation into these events is now concluded, and we have terminated the employment of additional employees who were found to have been directly involved in disruptive activity," the Google spokesperson said at the time.

But affected workers say they should not have been fired for protesting the company's actions.

"We must resist Google's repression of worker organizing, and demand that Google be held responsible for their retaliatory actions against employees asking for ethical applications of their labor," Zelda Montes, a former Google software engineer who was fired for participating in the protest, said in a statement.

"Employees, including Google employees, have the right to protest working conditions through concerted activity, and a protest concerning the kind of work that employees are asked to do can be protected," said Benjamin Sachs, Kestnbaum Professor of Labor and Industry at Harvard Law School. "Even a sit-in in certain circumstances can be protected activity... Now, that's not always true, it depends on the facts, and it depends on things like how disruptive the protest is, whether employer property is seized [and] the duration of the work stoppage."

The protests from Google workers over the company's cloud-computing deal with Israel's government come more than six months since the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas militants left some 1,200 dead in Israel, and as Israel's counteroffensive attacks in Gaza have now killed more than 34,183 people in Gaza, according to tallies from the Palestinian health ministry. More than 70% of those killed in Gaza have been women and children, according to the ministry.

The ongoing civilian carnage in Gaza has deeply divided the American public, and protests over US government and business support for Israel have erupted on college campuses and across corporate America in recent weeks.

In the wake of the protests at Google, CEO Sundar Pichai sent a company-wide memo urging staffers to keep "***politics***" out of the workplace. Pichai told workers that "this is a business, and not a place to act in a way that disrupts coworkers." Pichai went on to urge Googlers to not "fight over disruptive issues or debate ***politics***" in the workplace.

-CNN's Catherine Thorbecke contributed to this report.

By Clare Duffy, CNN

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