

Workers accuse Google of ‘tantrum’ after 50 fired over Israel contract protest

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Google has been accused of throwing a “tantrum” after sacking more than 50 workers in response to a protest over the company’s military ties to the Israeli government – firings that have shone a light on a controversial project and long-simmering tensions between staff and management. The workers were sacked following protests at Google offices in New York City and Sunnyvale, California, organized by No Tech for Apartheid – an alliance of Google and Amazon workers who have been protesting against a \$1.2bn contract with the Israeli government called Project Nimbus that they claim will make it “easier for the Israeli government to surveil Palestinians and force them off their land”. Initially, Google fired 28 workers over the protests and then fired more than 20 workers a few days later. The firings are the largest to occur since Israel’s military campaign in response to the 7 October 2023 terrorist attack by Hamas in which about 1,200 people were killed and more than 200 hostages were taken. Since then, more than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, including more than 14,000 children and 9,670 women. Google has fired and reprimanded workers for participating in protests before, such as over a 2018 walkout and sit-in protest about sexual harassment issues at the company, but not previously to this extent. In March, Google fired a cloud engineer who protested against an Israel tech event in New York City. Emaan Haseem, a software engineer at Google and organizer with No Tech for Apartheid, was one of the fired workers. “Many of us had just recently gotten promoted. I was the fastest promoted person underneath my manager,” she said. This was a peaceful protest, she said, “with high visibility, high transparency, that we livestreamed. Everything and everybody could see how it went.” Haseem said the sit-in protests were a response to Google’s refusal to engage with workers’ concerns. “Look at the way Google has overreacted, so emotionally, and has lashed out at 50 workers over this contract rather than giving any more transparency, clarity, or attempting to prove they are not especially providing the Israeli military resources to aid and abet their genocide and continue their apartheid,” added Haseem. “They fully had the option to do that but instead they chose to throw a tantrum and take it out on 50 workers, many of whom were not involved in the sit-in. “It was done so emotionally, so irrationally, that Google has also taken its mask off in the process. It has shown its honest and true self, how contradictory they are, how they don’t actually care about doing the right thing, about not being evil, about their values where we should speak up and speak out against anything wrong that we see happening in our work or in the workplace.” Since the contract was awarded in 2021, workers at Google and Amazon have been organizing in opposition to the corporations’ joint contract with the Israeli military and government. The \$1.2bn contract to provide cloud services “allows for further surveillance of and unlawful data collection on Palestinians, and facilitates expansion of Israel’s illegal settlements on Palestinian land”, according to an op-ed workers wrote in 2021. The firings have disrupted the financial stability of workers, Haseem said,

but she and others affected have received significant support from co-workers and others. She also said that one of the biggest challenges with the campaign against Project Nimbus was outreach and educating others on the issues – something which Google’s firings had only facilitated. Hasan Ibraheem, a Google software engineer in New York who was fired and arrested for participating in the protest, said he and other workers were put on administrative leave, losing corporate access, and then fired the next day by email en masse. “We don’t know of anyone who had actually been reached out to by HR. We were asked no questions. There was no consulting with us. No one asked us anything. It was just a very cold mass email sent out, you are now fired, goodbye, because they don’t want to deal with us, they want to silence us and we’re not going to stay silent,” said Ibraheem. “We don’t want our labor to be used for aiding a genocide and that’s why we did that action and we are going to continue fighting to have this project dropped.” The workers declined to comment on any potential legal proceedings they may pursue in response to the firings. No Tech for Apartheid called the firings “illegal” in a blogpost in response to Google’s actions. A spokesperson for Google said in an email on the firings: “We continued our investigation into the physical disruption inside our buildings on April 16, looking at additional details provided by coworkers who were physically disrupted, as well as those employees who took longer to identify because their identity was partly concealed – like by wearing a mask without their badge – while engaged in the disruption. 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.” They denied firing any employees not involved. Google also denied protesters’ characterizations of Project Nimbus, stating: “We have been very clear that the Nimbus contract is for workloads running on our commercial cloud by Israeli government ministries, who agree to comply with our Terms of Service and Acceptable Use Policy. This work is not directed at highly sensitive, classified, or military workloads relevant to weapons or intelligence services.”