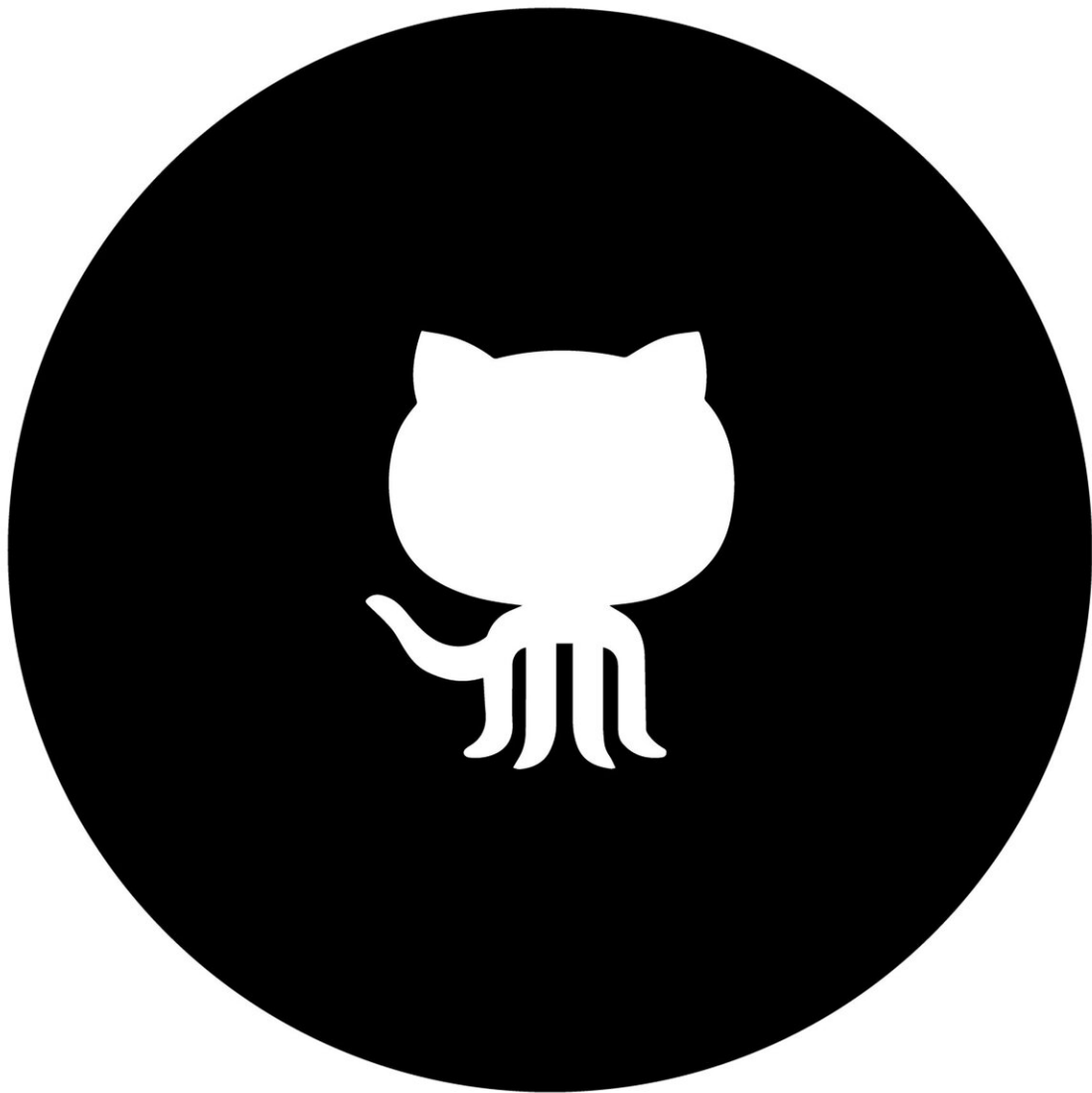


Employees of Microsoft's GitHub demand company cancel its contract with ICE

October 10 2019, by Johana Bhuiyan



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GitHub became the latest technology company to come under fire for its supporting role in the Trump administration's immigration clampdown Wednesday, with employees of the Microsoft-owned company demanding Chief Executive Nat Friedman cancel a \$200,000 contract with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

In an [open letter](#) on Twitter, employees of the cloud-based service for managing [software code](#) said continuing to work with ICE would make the company "complicit in widespread human rights abuses."

The letter was published a day after GitHub announced a \$500,000 donation to nonprofits "working to support immigrant communities targeted by the current administration," according to an all-staff memo Friedman sent. In it, Friedman defended the company's relationship with ICE despite his disapproval of "many of the current administration's immigration policies."

"Attempting to cancel a purchase will not convince the current administration to alter immigration policy," Friedman wrote. "Other actions, such as public advocacy, supporting lawsuits, meaningful philanthropy, and leveraging the vast resources of Microsoft will have the greatest likelihood of affecting public policy. Our voice is heard better by policymakers when we have a seat at the table."

But the employees who spoke out were not swayed by Friedman's reasoning or the commitment to donate \$500,000. "We cannot offset human lives with money. There is no donation that can offset the harm that ICE is perpetrating with the help of our labor," the letter read.

"GitHub has held a 'seat at the table' for over 2 years, as these illegal and dehumanizing policies have escalated, with little to show for it. Continuing to hold this contract does not improve our bargaining power with ICE."

GitHub workers' public opposition to the ICE contract is the latest incident in a string of employee-led actions and calls to cut ties with the agency. Employees at Microsoft, GitHub's parent company, began protesting the software maker's \$19.4 million contract with ICE in June 2018, accusing executives of "abdicating" ethical responsibility.

"We are part of a growing movement, comprised of many across the industry who recognize the grave responsibility that those creating powerful technology have to ensure what they build is used for good, and not for harm," the 2018 memo read.

More recently, Whole Foods employees protested Amazon's work with Palantir, a data-analytics company whose software has been used in ICE raids, and the company's sale of facial recognition technology to law enforcement. Amazon continues to defend its relationships with law enforcement agencies.

A former employee of Chef, a software automation company, had more luck effecting change. After the former [employee](#) deleted code that could be used in Chef's software as a form of protest over its work with ICE, the company said in September it would not renew the contract.

In response to a request for comment, a GitHub spokesperson pointed to Friedman's original memo.

Mijente, an activist group that started the #notechforICE movement and has spearheaded many of the protests and demonstrations against corporate ICE contracts, said the [company](#) is deluding itself into thinking

having a "seat at the table" would change immigration policies.

"None of the tech CEOs who sat down with (President Donald) Trump after he got elected made a difference in the policies we see enacted today. Why would continued engagement yield anything different in the future?" Jacinta Gonzalez, a senior campaign organizer at Mijente, said in a statement. "They're deluding themselves, and we're proud of the workers at these companies who see past the prevarication of their executives and see to the heart of the issue: If you work for ICE, you're upholding this regime."

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