

Group: Tesla workers fired after union push at NY plant

February 16 2023, by Michelle Chapman



Tesla Gigafactory 2 is shown Friday, March 18, 2022, in Buffalo, N.Y. Several employees at the factory have been fired after launching union organizing efforts two days ago, according to Tesla Workers United. Credit: AP Photo/Frank Franklin II, File

Several employees at a Tesla factory in New York have been fired a day

after launching union organizing efforts, according to Tesla Workers United.

The workers at the Buffalo plant received an email Wednesday evening updating them on a new policy that prohibits them from recording workplace meetings without all participants' permission, the group said in a release Thursday. It said that such restrictions violate federal labor law and flouts New York's one-party consent law to record conversations.

"We're angry. This won't slow us down. This won't stop us," Sara Costantino, a current Tesla employee and organizing committee member, said in a prepared statement. "They want us to be scared, but I think they just started a stampede. We can do this. But I believe we will do this."

The Tesla plant, which makes solar panels and other renewable energy technology, is not far from a Starbucks location where workers voted to unionize last year.

TWU said that the firings were unacceptable and that the expectations placed on Tesla workers are "unfair, unattainable, ambiguous and ever changing."

"I feel blindsided, I got COVID and was out of the office, then I had to take a bereavement leave. I returned to work, was told I was exceeding expectations and then Wednesday came along," organizing committee member Arian Berek, who is one of the fired employees, said in a statement. "I strongly feel this is in retaliation to the committee announcement, and it's shameful."

The Rochester Regional Joint Board of Workers United has filed a complaint against Tesla with the National Labor Relations Board,

accusing the electric vehicle maker of unfair labor practices.

In the complaint, the group lists the names of several employees who were part of the factory's autopilot department that were fired. The group says that it believes Tesla "terminated these individuals in retaliation for union activity and to discourage union activity." It is asking the NLRB for injunctive relief "to prevent irreparable destruction of employee rights resulting from Tesla's unlawful conduct."

On Thursday, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said without specifically referring to the situation at the Tesla plant in Buffalo that, "the president supports fundamental rights for workers under the National Labor Relations Act, including the right to organize free from intimidation or coercion."

As part of union organizing efforts, the Tesla Workers United organizing committee said in a letter to management Tuesday that employees are seeking a voice on the job at the plant in Buffalo and want to "build an even more collaborative environment that will strengthen the company."

Tesla CEO Elon Musk has taken a hard line against organized labor, despite an invitation to the United Auto Workers union to hold an organizing vote at Tesla's factory in Fremont, California. In 2021 Tesla was ordered by the National Labor Relations Board to make Musk delete a 2018 tweet in which it said that he unlawfully threatened employees with loss of stock options if they chose to be represented by the UAW.

An email was sent to Tesla seeking comment, but it has been widely reported that Tesla has disbanded its media relations team. The email sent to Tesla bounced back as undeliverable.

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Citation: Group: Tesla workers fired after union push at NY plant (2023, February 16) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2023-02-group-tesla-workers-union-efforts.html>

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