Google fires 28 workers in aftermath of protests over big tech deal with Israeli government

April 18 2024, by Michael Liedtke

A sign is shown on a Google building at their campus in Mountain View, Calif., on Sept. 24, 2019. On Friday, April 12, 2024, Google announced it was testing removing links to California news websites from some people's search results. The search giant said it was preparing in case the Legislature passed a bill requiring it to pay media companies a fee for linking to its content. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File

Google has fired 28 employees in the aftermath of protests over technology that the internet company is supplying the Israeli government amid the Gaza war, further escalating tensions surrounding a hot-button deal.

The firings confirmed by Google late Wednesday came a day after nine employees were arrested during sit-in protests at offices in New York and Sunnyvale, California, after the company called police.

The dissent roiling Google centers on "Project Nimbus," a $1.2 billion contract signed in 2021 that calls upon Google and Amazon to provide the Israeli government with cloud computing and artificial intelligence services.

The protests are being organized primarily by a group called No Tech For Apartheid. Google says Nimbus isn't being deployed in weaponry or intelligence gathering.

In a statement, Google attributed the firing of the 28 employees to "completely unacceptable behavior" that prevented some workers from doing their jobs and created a threatening atmosphere. The Mountain View, California, company added it is still investigating what happened during the protests, implying more workers could still be fired.

In a blog post, No Tech For Apartheid accused Google of lying about what happened inside its offices during what it described as "peaceful sit-in" that received overwhelming support from other workers who weren't participating in the protest.

"This flagrant act of retaliation is a clear indication that Google values its $1.2 billion contract with the genocidal Israeli government and military

more than its own workers," No Tech For Apartheid asserted.

The contract raising the ire of some Google workers runs within the company's cloud computing division that is overseen by a former Oracle executive, Thomas Kurian.

Under Kurian's leadership, cloud computing has emerged as one of Google's fastest-growing divisions, with revenue of $33 billion last year, a 26% increase from 2022. A wide range of private-sector companies also buy Google's cloud computing services, in addition to governments around the world.

Google workers have periodically staged angry protests over other deals the company has been working on and have also raised ethical concerns about the way it is developing artificial intelligence.

One of the previous employee uprisings resulted in Google deciding in 2018 to end a contract with the U.S. defense department called "Project Maven" that involved helping the armed forces analyze military videos.

But Google has continued to thrive, despite the internal misgivings about the way it is making some of its money. Its revenue mostly comes through digital advertising sold through an internet empire that depends on its dominant search engine as its main pillar.

Google's parent company, Alphabet Inc., posted a $74 billion profit last year and now employs about 182,000 workers worldwide—about 83,000 more people than in 2018 when it abandoned Project Maven.

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