

Google employees leave work to protest treatment of women

November 1 2018, by Michael Liedtke



A Google employee holds a sign reading "Don't be evil" as employees walk off the job in a protest against what they said is the tech company's mishandling of sexual misconduct allegations against executives on Thursday, Nov. 1, 2018, in New York. (AP Photo/Mae Anderson)

Carrying signs that included a mocking use of the company's original "Don't be evil" motto, thousands of Google employees around the world briefly walked off the job Thursday to protest what they said was the

tech giant's mishandling of sexual misconduct allegations against executives.

From Tokyo, Singapore and London to New York, Seattle and San Francisco, highly paid engineers and other workers staged walkouts of about an hour, reflecting rising #MeToo-era frustration among women over frat-house behavior and other misconduct in heavily male Silicon Valley.

In Dublin, organizers used megaphones to address the outdoor crowd of men and women, while in other places, workers gathered in packed conference rooms or lobbies. In New York, there appeared to be as many men as women out in the streets, while in Cambridge, Massachusetts, men outnumbered women by perhaps 6 to 1.

"Time is up on sexual harassment!" organizer Vicki Tardif Holland shouted, her voice hoarse, at a gathering of about 300 people in Cambridge. "Time is up on systemic racism. Time is up on abuses of power. Enough is enough!"

About 1,000 Google workers in San Francisco swarmed into a plaza in front of the city's historic Ferry Building, chanting, "Women's rights are workers' rights!" Thousands turned out at Google's Mountain View, California, headquarters.



Workers protest against Google's handling of sexual misconduct allegations at the company's Mountain View, Calif., headquarters on Thursday, Nov. 1, 2018. (AP Photo/Noah Berger)

The demonstrations reflected a sense among some of the 94,000 employees at Google and its parent Alphabet Inc. that the company isn't living up to its professed ideals, as expressed in its "Don't be evil" slogan and its newer injunction in its corporate code of conduct : "Do the right thing."

"We have the eyes of many companies looking at us," Google employee Tanuja Gupta said in New York. "We've always been a vanguard company, so if we don't lead the way, nobody else will."

The protests unfolded a week after The New York Times detailed allegations of sexual misconduct about the creator of Google's Android

software, Andy Rubin. The newspaper said Rubin received a \$90 million severance package in 2014 after Google concluded the accusations were credible. Rubin has denied the allegations.

The same story also disclosed allegations of sexual misconduct against other executives, including Richard DeVaul, a director at the Google-affiliated lab that created self-driving cars and internet-beaming balloons. DeVaul had remained at the "X" lab after the accusations surfaced a few years ago, but resigned on Tuesday without severance, Google said.



Google workers take part in a protest against what they said is the tech company's mishandling of sexual misconduct allegations against executives Thursday, Nov 1, 2018, in Seattle. (Alan Berner/The Seattle Times via AP)

In an unsigned statement, the Google protesters called for an end to forced arbitration in harassment and discrimination cases, a practice that

requires employees to give up their right to sue and often includes confidentiality agreements.

Besides being angry about what they contend has been lenient handling of executives who mistreat women, the protest organizers demanded more aggressive steps for gender pay equity and more inclusive hiring practices to reduce the high concentration of white and Asian men in the industry's best-paying programming jobs.

Women account for 31 percent of Google's employees worldwide, and it's lower for leadership roles. The numbers are similar elsewhere in Silicon Valley.

"I have seen friends get hurt and have their careers destroyed by this, not just at Google but everywhere," protester J.J. Wanda, a male software engineer, said in Mountain View. "We need to show that time's up."



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In a statement, Google CEO Sundar Pichai said the company is reviewing all the "constructive ideas" from employees to improve policies and practices.

Beyond Google, Facebook has faced criticism over pay inequity and discrimination. The appearance of a Facebook executive behind Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh during his confirmation hearings also caused rifts inside the company.

As Thursday dawned, organizers had predicted about 1,500 employees would participate in the walkouts, mostly women. But the numbers appeared to exceed that, based on media accounts and images posted on the protest's Twitter account.

The protests at Google are the latest sign that frustrations among women are reaching a boiling point, said Stephanie Creary, a professor who specializes in workplace and diversity issues at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.



A sign on a building at the Google campus in Kirkland, Wash. is shown Thursday, Nov. 1, 2018. Google employees in Kirkland and around the world briefly walked off the job Thursday in a protest against what they said is the tech company's mishandling of sexual misconduct allegations against executives. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

"People simply aren't willing to put up with it anymore," Creary said. "The workers at Google seem to be saying, 'How is it that we are still having to have this conversation?'"

Google's CEO assured employees earlier this week that the company would support them in their protest. He also apologized for Google's "past actions."

"I understand the anger and disappointment that many of you feel," Pichai said in an email. "I feel it as well, and I am fully committed to making progress on an issue that has persisted for far too long in our society ... and, yes, here at Google, too."

Pichai last week sought to assure employees that the company had cracked down on misconduct, saying it had fired 48 employees, including 13 senior managers, for sexual harassment in recent years without giving any of them severance packages.



Workers protest against Google's handling of sexual misconduct allegations at the company's Mountain View, Calif., headquarters on Thursday, Nov. 1, 2018. (AP Photo/Noah Berger)

In recent months, Google and other Silicon Valley companies have also been plagued by dissension over other corporate policies, customer privacy and what some employees regard as misuses of technology.

More than 1,000 Google employees signed a letter protesting the company's plan to build a search engine that would comply with Chinese

ensorship rules.

And thousands signed a petition asking Google to cancel an artificial-intelligence contract to help the Pentagon improve the targeting of drone strikes. Google later said it won't renew the contract, according to published reports, and opted not to bid for another military contract that could be worth \$10 billion.



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A worker carries a sign during a protest against Google's handling of sexual misconduct allegations at the company's Mountain View, Calif., headquarters on Thursday, Nov. 1, 2018. (AP Photo/Noah Berger)



Employees at Google walk out of their workplace in Chicago, Thursday, Nov. 1, 2018, in a protest against what they said is the tech company's mishandling of sexual misconduct allegations against executives. (Zbigniew Bzdak/Chicago Tribune via AP)



Google employees, who walked off the job to protest the internet company's lenient treatment of executives accused of sexual misconduct, leave after attending a protest rally on Thursday, Nov. 1, 2018, in New York. Employees staged walkouts at offices from Tokyo to Singapore to London. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)



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Tanuja Gupta, programming director at Google, addresses hundreds of Google employees during a protest rally on Thursday, Nov. 1, 2018, in New York. Google employees around the world walked off the job Thursday in a protest

against what they said is the tech company's mishandling of sexual misconduct allegations against executives. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)



Meredith Whittaker, a research scientist at New York University who leads Google's Open Research Group, addresses hundreds of Google employees during a protest rally on Thursday, Nov. 1, 2018, in New York. Google employees around the world walked off the job Thursday in a protest against what they said is the tech company's mishandling of sexual misconduct allegations against executives. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)



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People outside the Google offices in Granary Square, London, Thursday Nov. 1, 2018. Hundreds of Google engineers and other workers walked off the job Thursday morning to protest the internet company's lenient treatment of executives accused of sexual misconduct. Employees were seen staging walkouts at offices in Tokyo, Singapore, London, and Dublin. (Stefan Rousseau/PA via AP)



Google employees outside its European headquarters in Dublin, Ireland, Thursday Nov. 1, 2018. Hundreds of Google engineers and other workers walked off the job Thursday morning to protest the internet company's lenient treatment of executives accused of sexual misconduct. Employees were seen staging walkouts at offices in Tokyo, Singapore, London, and Dublin. (Niall Carson/PA via AP)



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This photo shows signage outside the offices of Google in San Francisco with the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge in the background, Wednesday, Oct. 31, 2018. Hundreds of Google employees are expected to temporarily leave their jobs Thursday morning in a mass walkout protesting the internet company's lenient treatment of executives accused of sexual misconduct. The San Francisco office is one of the offices that the walkout will take place. (AP Photo/Michael Liedtke)



In this Oct. 20, 2015 file photo, employees ride company bicycles outside Google headquarters in Mountain View, Calif. Hundreds of Google employees are expected to temporarily leave their jobs Thursday morning Nov. 1, 2018, in a mass walkout protesting the internet company's lenient treatment of executives accused of sexual misconduct. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File)

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