

# Tech Workers Rise Up: Organizing Google's Worldwide Worker Walkout

*Transcript by Dan Feidt, Unicorn Riot*

**Unicorn Riot** [00:00:02] At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on December 11th 2018:

**Unicorn Riot** [00:00:06] MeToo and Workers Power, Building solidarity at Google and beyond:.

**Unicorn Riot** [00:00:09] An open forum hosted by the Tech Workers Coalition and Radius on campus covered the inner workings of the global Google walkout. The truth about how Google divides its labor force between contractors and workers.

**Unicorn Riot** [00:00:20] And the unprecedented worker mobilization of 2018 against the biggest companies in the tech industry. Earlier that day far right Representative Steve King demanded social media surveillance of Google workers.

**US Rep Steve King** [00:00:35] We either need to know who they are and look at their social media.

**Unicorn Riot** [00:00:39] On November 1st Vicki Tardiff helped lead a worker walkout at the Cambridge Google office nearby. As other workers left their job sites worldwide.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:00:49] A fact that a young woman. Was harassed in her job interview. So here I am trying to get young women into this industry. And they are being harassed when they walk in the front door. Time is up on that.

**Unicorn Riot** [00:01:10] Unicorn Riot covered a "Tech won't build it" panel at MIT on July 11th 2018 which focused on worker organizing against ICE and Homeland Security contracts as well as other coercive technologies.

**Unicorn Riot** [00:01:21] This panel was about an hour long.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:01:26] First I just wanted to thank Radius at MIT for hosting us here. It's very exciting to be here. So my name's Kristen Sheets, I'm a volunteer organizer with the Tech Workers Coalition. I'm joined by Vicki Tardiff who's a worker at the Google Cambridge office and had a leading role in organizing the November 1st walkout. So the structure: Vicki and I will have a short conversation but the event is an open forum so we'll leave a lot of time for collective discussion. We really just want to help frame an orientation to the conversation. But then. Use the time that we have together to talk about what's going on at your workplaces. Ideas this brings up what's happening in the broader political world. It's all fair game.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:02:13] Yeah.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:02:17] So Vicki on November 1st twenty thousand Googlers at all levels of the company walked out. I was wondering if you could walk us through the reasons for the walkout what organizing it internally looked like. Take us through the immediate lead up. And the day of.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:02:32] Yes sure. So before I start I have to do this ridiculous thing of saying that I am here speaking for myself and not speaking for Google.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:02:42] Just in case someone was confused by that. So anyway so the week like literally the week before the walkout there is an article [in] The New York Times that listed a history of various people at Google who had engaged in harassment. Most famously Andy Rubin being paid 90 million dollars to go away.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:03:07] This caused a huge amount of chatter as you can imagine internally. Google has a huge number of internal forums, mailing lists, whatnot and they kind of all lit up with what the fuck. And. That day that Thursday there was a town hall. So Google famously does it's TGIF on Thursdays where you can come and ask questions and they still sort of did the standard meeting. I think was Google Photos that day and the like oh yeah there is this article and we feel that. Let's hear from Google Photos. Which. Didn't help set the tone of. They aren't taking this seriously.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:03:45] So I'm on a bunch of women at Google mailing lists and a lot of folks were talking on those lists and saying I want how many people don't show up to work on Friday. And I was like I'm calling in sick. But we kind of all stayed online. I didn't do work. But I was still logged into my Google Corp account and we're talking. And Claire Stapleton kind of said you know I'm so mad I just want to walk out, who's with me? She formed a mailing list and it immediately got like 200 people and it sort of snow -- I think is important to understand how networking works because you know, started with this mailing list of women. And then next thing you know they're reaching out to [Applied Googler Network?] so we're pulling in from there. The various lists around Dragonfly and Maven kind of got pulled in you know. Lists for TVCs [Temps Vendors Contractors] got pulled in. You just took these groups who'd sort of been talking about various issues at Google and they kind of all joined in and said, "Yeah we we're mad as hell and we want to do something. "

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:04:53] I think the other important - and it was important does it create this broad coalition right. We wouldn't have got to 20,000 people, if it had stayed. Because it originally was the women's walkout. And we quickly said you know what. We need allies -- drop just women. It's Googlers walking out. But by having this broad coalition we tapped into so much talent across the company and across, you know, across the world even. So there is sort of a central group of organizers at the corporate level and then a bunch of us sort of at each site. Sort of said, "All right we need to organize locally but we can't organize a Cambridge walkout from Mountain View." And so pulling in people from Cambridge say, "OK how we doing this here?" And so you kind of have this hub and spoke model.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:05:41] And like I said the talent was the most amazing thing. Because you had people just raising their hands saying, I'll do something. And then a lot of people who maybe didn't feel like they could publicly stand up and say I will lead this, could behind the scenes, say I can't raise my hand, but I want to help you this way.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:06:04] The most notable example is there's someone who works on Google's corporate communications who talked to me about like how to communicate, which I thought was funny, that she was sort of undermining, because you couldn't it publicly [?], like come on tell me how to say this. So it's like that sort of thing where we could sort of tap into a bunch of talent that I thought was really amazing.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:06:26] Yeah there's a couple things that really struck me from that one like tapping into these skills that people have and like sort of like pivoting how they're used. Like using them for something that you guys actually care about rather than you

know like to the product specifications that you're getting from business or otherwise. And also that this was built not just out of thin air but leveraging networks that existed before the initial New York Times article, things that have been happening for a long time. So maybe that's another place we can segue that the days immediately preceding the walkout in this organizing wasn't the first thing that happened and that it, had, it was precipitated by many events that happened before. I was wondering. If you could maybe walk us through what those things looked like. Like the anti Maven and Dragonfly stuff and then also like broader like what led us to a moment where like a walk out of twenty thousand Googlers could be possible in the tech industry which everyone says is ideologically like difficult.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:07:31] Yes I think there are a bunch of events, some sort of global or external to Google and some internal you know.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:07:42] Donald Trump gets elected and I think a lot of people in tech suddenly had this like whoa, how could what we are building be used in ways that I don't like and had this moment. Perhaps we should have always been having these conversations but it was this very concrete of I can see how what I'm doing will lead to bad things for society. And then you had all this stuff about immigration and a lot of people in this industry are immigrants, right? And so it's very concrete. It's my coworker next to me is an immigrant and I'm worried for them. What am I building that's going to ruin their life? So you start to get the whole "Tech Won't Build It" thing going. And those conversations happen obviously externally but also internally.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:08:27] And then I mean honestly some of how I'm involved is the James Damore thing happened and I and a few other people in this room are named in that lawsuit for basically saying you can't discriminate against women and minorities in this industry. And so it became this. "Hi nice to meet you. My name was also published on Breitbart." Oh. By which is. It was weird but this is like OK we're in this together. What are we gonna do about it? And then you know and then fast forward to Maven gets leaked. And so like most people I read about it at first in the news, in the New York Times and it's like we're doing what now? We're we're building space robots or drones to murder people, that's not good. And or I should say we were bidding on this contract to potentially research how to do that. And so there's a lot of this like oh you know this is a concrete example of something I don't want to be associated with. Fast forward to -- excuse me. That one wasn't leaked. I had known about it before it was leaked. Dragonfly didn't. So sort of like, things seem to be coming out about Maven and the next thing you know Dragonfly leaks and like we're going back into China now. Like, when did that happen? And what does that mean?

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:09:56] So you have these sort of conversations happening about tech and all these things and then you know that's layered on top of the fact that there's a group for women at Google, there's a group for Black Googlers and various other people who are often underrepresented sort of find these ways to sort of communicate and support one another. So you have that sort of base layer and then these sort of more project-based outrages and then see how there's fuel there. Right. It was it's like a forest fire right where you have all the dry kindling down and then there's a spark which is the Andy Rubin gets paid 90 million dollars and people say that's it I'm done. I think that very much led to the, "OK. We need to do something." It's not enough just sit here and talk amongst ourselves anymore. And like you said it started out this conversation and then the conversation got leaked and so it was like I guess we are doing this because the New York Times just said we are. And it became OK. OK. We've committed to this. We're doing November 1st at 11:10. Googlers are incredibly pragmatic. It's like. What are we walking out about, right.

And it became a let's actually put together a list of demands. Let's not just walk out [and] have them say they're being little children, you know, throwing a fit, but actually say this is what we want.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:11:27] And because we had that broad coalition we could sort of pull in. It wasn't just about sexual harassment. It is about things like, you know, I think it's important that the requests for to end enforced arbitration in our contracts isn't just about sexual harassment. It's about all employee issues particularly discrimination because there are so -- I mean some of us have been researching it that the group that does arbitration for Google, the outside vendor. Only 22 percent of their arbitrators are women and only 9 percent are minorities. So if you're a black woman at Google facing discrimination the chances of finding someone it looks like you on that panel is basically zero. Right. And so it's important that the full legal spectrum be available. But then I mean other things like how are people under-levelled. I mean there are all these other issues that we could bring together to cover everyone in the coalition not just, you know, women at Google. And so I think that was important.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:12:34] You talked a little bit about the under-leveling and just the culture of harassment and discrimination at Google. I feel like in technology, this sort of ideology around meritocracy has sort of been weaponized by tech execs to sort of justify the existing norms and leadership structures in the industry, in particular the way they look and who's represented in them. I was wondering if maybe you could talk about that and like how this ideology is used to obfuscate sort of the real issues that are workplace issues that damage workers.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:13:08] Yes. So, you know Google's been famously part of a bunch of lawsuits. One of them around how women are paid at Google and the sort of standard line is we did the research and everyone at a certain level is paid the same within a certain margin of error. And what they never address is well how did you get to that level. Like what made someone a level four versus a level five. What made someone a administrative business partner versus a program manager. And they don't address the the way people get funneled into certain levels and into certain job titles. Based on their gender, based on where they went to school. Right. Like if you. Graduate with a degree from M.I.T. you are looked at differently than if you graduate with a degree from an HBCU[Historically Black Colleges and Universities]. Which is ridiculous because there is incredible talent at HBCUs, right, that goes under utilized but they just see that on your resume and they see Howard on your resume and like. Do they know as much as someone who went to M.I.T. And so maybe you bring them in at a level three and instead of a level 4. Well that. That means you're paid less because you're under leveled. It also means that it gets harder. Right. Because you have to jump up to level four before being level five. And.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:14:32] We don't have any data for. How is it harder or does it take longer for black engineers to get promoted versus white engineers. Women versus men. We don't have any of that. There's no transparency. That's one of the things we ask for is: Pay and transparency on how people level based on demographics.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:14:52] And it's not even addressing the fact that I don't think it was widely known before the walkout that over half of Google's workers are not full time employees. They are what we call TVCs, temps, vendors and contractors. And. Because of they're not full time employees they don't get benefits. They don't they're not paid as well. And Google will hide behind the laws. We have to keep them separate because the law says we can't mix you two. To a point was so ridiculous when the YouTube shootings happened the

TVCs there didn't get the real time updates about safety because they're on a different network and they were not allowed in the meeting the next day to talk about how to cope with the shooting which just happened. Right. Now, the shooter didn't say what color is your badge before opening right. They just fired indiscriminately. So it's ridiculous that they're excluded from those things. But Google says no we can't. They're different their TV sees without addressing that. They can hire janitors. They can hire secure the security guards. This is how ridiculous it is, because most secret guards are TVCs which means they can't attend meetings to talk about the job they're doing to keep us safe. Right. And so it's like there's this caste system and it doesn't matter how good a security guard you are, you're never going to be a full time employee. And it is that sort of thing that we need to address.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:16:22] Something that struck me at my time at Google too is TVCs aren't oftentimes they'll get sort of, the rationale is that TVCs have different skill sets which is why we need to hire externally and why we can't hire you know security guards direct or cafeterias direct. But this also permeates to all levels. Like many white collar workers, program programmers, project managers, data scientists will be TVCs as well which I think is sort of interesting and like, casts that rationale in a different light and sort of exposes what the actual goals are having a totally on call, half your staff on call essentially that can be dismissed at any time for any reason.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:17:05] Yeah that's a good point that like you said a lot of the linguists, the data analysts, a lot of business people are TVCs, often working right alongside full time employees doing effectively the same job. But they aren't protected. Your contract, you know can be they can do away with the contract at any time. And in fact don't know how well it's known most TVCs can only be employed as a TVC for a year or two and then their contract has to be voided, to avoid these legal implications that they're full time employees.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:17:39] So one way to control TVCs is to put this carrot out there: if you do a really good job. We'll convert you and they tell me and you and you knew the same. And we're all fighting for one position as a full time employee. So I bust my butt and I'm like oh sorry Kristen was converted. Maybe next time, Vicki, you can do it right. Keep working hard. So it's a way to underpay people. Put them at risk for losing the job any time make them feel that risk while doing services that are critical to Google's operations. It is time to take a look at this sort of caste system and how we can bring everyone up to a level playing field. I guess.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:18:27] Has this internal caste system and hierarchy affected the ability to organize for change at Google? And then just Google's massively international company which I think was reflected in the walkouts with people at think over 50 offices walking out. I was wondering how the international nature of the company and the industry affects that as well.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:18:53] Right, it is tricky because there are issues that are sort of U.S. specific. The arbitration one is mostly U.S. because in fact most of my European colleagues didn't know that forced arbitration was a thing because illegal in most European countries. So I could maybe move to Europe I could get out of it. And so I mean it makes communication harder but it also makes sort of making sure we're all fighting for the same things a little harder because it's easy to sort of say well I have this problem. And someone else'll be like but I don't. And so trying to find common ground. It can be hard. I think the more difficult part is this split between TVCs and full time employees makes it harder for us

to communicate, to find common ground and places to work together. Because if they are suddenly moved to a different, like. They're suddenly moved from one part of the building to another. And like oh I don't run into them I wonder where they went. And if they're not allowed on the same mailing lists as I am it's harder to communicate that way. And so are these structural things that make it harder to organize with specifically TVCs. Now I will say that Google's sort of vast network of communication channels makes that part easier right. It did allow these other these coalitions to, where places overlapped, right, where women engineers overlap with the black Googler network. We could pull, you know, those two unite. Where the Maven people overlapped. We could pull that right. So that sort of ability to communicate did help sort of organize.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:20:37] I imagine also when, notably with the F T's and TVC divide and also like with what you're explaining with your European colleagues not having, like it's illegal there. That can also be a basis of solidarity like that. Like. When you're like we have forced arbitration and somebody in the Dublin office is like what the? That's illegal like what? Like that can be a thing to rally people. In sort of like an ally ship solidarity.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:21:07] Yeah I mean that that's definitely true. There is that sort of solidarity. There's also the the fact that things like. You know when Maven and Dragonfly were in the news there was talk of supporting "our military" and a bunch of people in Dublin and Zurich(?) like "our? What is this 'our', we are speaking out."

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:21:30] Right. So. It helps on a lot of these issues to have voices outside the United States who are just as much engaged in Google. And Googlers speaking up because it gives a little space for some of us in the US to sort of join in where maybe we wouldn't if it were just a U.S. issue.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:21:51] Before we wrap up and move to the forum part I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what's next in terms of consolidating the coalitions working together. Obviously there's still major issues happening at Google. Many of the demands outside of forced arbitration have not been met. By [CEO] Sundar and the C Suite.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:22:12] Right. So the conversations are continuing. I don't. You know it's it's not at all obvious from the outside but the conversations are continuing internally. There is a lot of talk of how to move forward. You know there are five demands. How to move each of them forward. Independently because they don't have to move in lockstep. You saw a little bit of that this week with some tweets about ending enforced arbitration to try to take advantage of Sundar testifying today. You know there are people talking about how to move forward the idea of getting more employee representation on the board and at the C suite level. That's about as important. So you know a lot of people talking about how best to move forward. I think that it seems quieter than it is because a lot of that discussion is happening outside of work hours for a lot of legal reasons.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:23:19] Awesome. Thank you so much Vicki.

**Audience Remark** [00:23:29] So one thing I wanted to mention in the broader industry is that like wow. So there are kind of two parts of the forced arbitration demand that the womens walk out made was around sexual harassment. One was for cases of discrimination. And while Google acceded to one they have continued to not do the other which is why it came up in the congressional hearing today.

**Audience Remark** [00:23:50] But one thing I have actually is kind of encouraging to hear is actually to look around the industry at other companies which are trying to recruit Googlers and say oh yes we have done that, like as of today my CEO has let me know that we are actually ending forced arbitration for like discrimination and sexual harassment.

**Audience Remark** [00:24:07] So I think I heard from someone who got a recruiter from Reddit or something like that emailed them and said, Are you looking for a new job. And he said, Well have you heard about this list of demands and what do you think about this one. And the recruiter said you know what. I just heard this morning that we are actually following that you know demand and I think that there was actually a lot of response to the overall demands that Googlers made where other companies in the industry have done an even better job than Google at at responding to that which I think is both a sign that these workers are like a class that can work together to make and move forward things but also that like even when Google doesn't do the right thing the Google walk out you know can help make important change happen.

**Audience Remark** [00:24:51] And like Vicki my opinions are my own and not those of my employer. [laughs] But but yeah I think that that's been a really you know. That has felt good to me to watch as someone who walked out you know you know on November 1st and say look I made a difference for other people in addition to the rule.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:25:13] I think that's a really good point because part of the power of putting this in contracts is Google says, here sign this is totally voluntary. The voluntary part is you don't have to work for Google. [laughs] You don't get to change the contract, they're not gonna let you cross out parts. And the way they get away with that is by having this be so pervasive that it's like, where are you going to work. And so as we chip away we get more and more power to change this everywhere. And so I think that's important.

**Audience Remark** [00:25:50] I am Mark. Not technically from Google and from verily [?] but it's the same. Voicing my own opinions like a friend. Vicky can you talk about the discussion about a union and whether unions are a useful form and things like that.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:26:11] Yeah so I mean. There are discussions about unions. I think it's particularly hard in an international organization to do unions because they mean different things in different countries, they have different powers. And. So the question is do we form a union in the US but how does that affect our international colleagues. When I grew up in a union household side I'm pro union. Oh I think they have a lot of power. In particular I think part of the power of unions is the communication that happens between the rank and file and and traditionally management, but we're going to say executives here, that a shop steward is an important part of that because it can help raise issues to the executives that they don't necessarily [?] see and do it in a productive way, of saying. It's not just a group with pitchforks and torches, right, showing up, "Uhh change," it's someone who can very, you know, give you the list of demands in a reasonable way and sort of have that conversation. And I think that is lacking. In a lot of tech companies the ability to have a communication between the executives and the rank and file. But like you said the international part makes it really hard to do a union. Across Google say.

**Audience Remark** [00:27:36] I'll keep talking if no one else wants to, i don't want to dominate the conversation. [laughs] So.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:27:41] Yeah please come up.

**Audience Remark** [00:27:43] My name's Charlie Well[?], I'm an engineer and just not associated with Google in any way. But. The obvious question comes up. Google has all this information about all these people that are troublemakers. Do you think they would consolidate that. Help them spot troublemakers in the future. What role.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:28:11] Well Steve King asked them to do that today.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:28:16] I will admit when it's, when this started and the call went out to to lead and like who would lead in each office, I was like do I really want to put my hand up and someone convinced me to. And part of it was a, "fuck it I don't care, let them fire me." So to be honest I've been on the, "Should I rage quit?" for about six months given Maven and Dragonfly and everything. And so I was like, "Well fuck it, let them fire me. That's better than rage quitting." I think because we've built this broad coalition. And we've had people. Who while not managers within Google, are very senior at what they do, stand up and say, put their names on this and say, "This needs to end." I think that, "They can't fire us all," is really what's happened. And so the power is in us uniting because if we start to fragment, which I fear is their strategy with the force arbitration thing. Is like oh, women, you got what you wanted. We're leaving all the underrepresented minorities over here. We can't do that. We have to stay a coalition because they will sort pick us off and and then yeah they can fire us.

**Audience Remark** [00:29:30] I mean I think for me you know I wasn't one of the leaders of the walkout, but I was one of the first 12 people to sign the "drop Dragonfly" letter and there certainly was some amount of like, you know are there are they really going to fire me. I mean there's like labor law, but there's also the media right. And if Google gets a reputation of firing engineers for taking ethical stands I think that's going to massively change the company culture. And thankfully you know we had a few hundred signatures within the first day. So you know if they really want to fire you know seven hundred and fifty of us they certainly can. But it feels unlikely especially given how much they push having us interview because we need to keep growing the company.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:30:09] Exactly. And I think it's important point, that if they fire. I mean. I'm impressed at how media savvy the movement got really quickly. It helped them we had some Google media people. Because it's like, yeah if they start firing. Lots of us right it's going to show up in the New York Times and then it's like look. Google was exploring how to launch in China when its engineers said, "Wait are we being evil? They were fired." You know that's not a story they want in the New York Times. I think that's part of the power of this.

**Audience Remark** [00:30:49] You talked about your success in building an email list in short order to distribute information about the walkout was going to be, what your demands were going to be. Can you talk about the techniques you used to be successful in such a short amount of time. Or maybe if there were dead ends in trying to get people connected.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:31:07] Yes. So. I mean it really was tapping into established networks. I think that's why it was built so quickly. That had we had to. Form a group of women, form a group of black Googlers, form a group opposed to Maven, a group opposed to Dragonfly, we couldn't have done that in five days. But instead it was these conversations were already happening and it was tapping into those and saying, hey if you wanted to join this broader coalition join us.



**Vicki Tardiff** [00:31:35] I think it helps to have some people named to be leaders even if it was just to be the face because there are people who don't feel comfortable standing up. And say you know, I certainly had people come to me and say. I want to help but I can't be public about it, what can I do? And so it is a way to sort of have conversations with people and and for you know. Be their storyteller at times but also feel that they can you make the signs? That you can tap into people's sort of where the comfort level is. And so a lot of it is. Is. Hard. I think what we're doing today is important right. It's like building the network here in Boston so that if there's issues at other Boston companies we can work together. But you don't get 20000 people together in five days what you do is you tap into those lists that already exist.

**Audience Remark** [00:32:35] And I think in particular just to go back to something you said earlier is that this is this is after like a year of feeling like every two months there's something. Starting from when the James Damore memo came out, following into and the follow up for that and people being sued and other things like that, into the dragon, er into Maven, into Dragonfly. And this was something that I think so many people could get behind because the demands I think where a really broad coalition built very quickly. But the reason that there was so many people there is to go back to your like, lit a match and lit that the hay bale that was already there on fire and it helped make the transition of a bunch of people from upset I'm not feeling like they knew what to do to something that seemed obviously right. And I think a huge part of that at least in my perspective was that demands were so clear, concise, and seemed like such obvious right things to do to make the workplace more fair that people couldn't, didn't feel the need to step back.

**Audience Remark** [00:33:43] Hi. You started mentioning you just now. But I work at Akamai Technologies just down the street here and I've sort of been eagerly awaiting for this Google thing to you know cross the street to our offices. I know I know that this is sort of designed for reaching out to other tech workers but have you had much traction with other people in other companies.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:34:02] Some. Um. It. I think other companies are sort of more dangerous to speak up and be like hey I'm leading a walkout. And so there have been people quietly reaching out. I know the folks running the enforced arbitration campaign have had people from other companies reach out and say hey how can we do this. You know some of them are Google specific like getting some on our boards as people[?] specific but forth- for a lot of these things whereas a broader coalition there are people sort of saying, hey how can I do this at my company. How can I. Help you with this broader industry issue like forced arbitration. Those conversations tend to be much quieter because a lot of folks don't fitness I feel comfortable speaking up.

**Audience Remark** [00:35:00] I mean I just my my thought when when I saw Google starting to walk out was first was that yes especially with the Maven thing that's when I saw it start first following things along. I just sort of figured oh if Google doesn't take away[?] the contract probably Amazon will and so it would be awesome if, you know there was some issue at Akamai. I mean just as a spectator, there was some issue at Akamai that was sort of somehow we doubt that, if there was some cross company communication then. We could see like a walkout from multiple companies based on one company sort of. You know doing something bad.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:35:39] I mean I'm definitely seeing it at Microsoft. There are people there who are against their sort of version of Maven. There were a few folks at Amazon but

they've sort of come out and said we're going to build it. We don't care. Yeah. There's I hear talk of these conversations happening at Facebook. So I think they're there. I don't know that those conversations are as public as the ones happening at Google I think. Because it's been happening at Google for so long, it's a sign that some of the internal com communication is broken down that people no longer feel like it's a useful conversation to have in-house. And so they're starting to talk to the New York Times or what not. So I don't know if that Facebook employees are there yet and their frustration with their own company.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:36:27] I think this also kind of touches on something you said earlier where right now it might seem quiet because it's just not out in the media but lots is happening internally in the organizing that's happening at Google and based on what I hear from others in the coalition I suspect it's similar at different tech companies. I also just wanted to plug that there is a Boston local of the Tech Workers Coalition for an independent volunteer run organization of tech workers. And we do a lot of self education and leadership development on how to be an organizer in your workplace and how to start building a coalition with your co-workers so you can make something like the Google walkout or something like that happen. If. That's. Honestly it's like dependent on the workplace and it's all initiated from folks in that workplace. Yeah I would encourage you to get involved.

**Audience Remark** [00:37:22] Thanks for your talk. I wanted to ask when you're speaking about the sort of dry kindling network spreading really fast effect it seems if the advantages of that kind of decentralized organizing are evident from what you said. I was curious if there are any particular challenges in terms of coordinating demands and messages and how you negotiated those in the case of the walkout which seemed like such a big success from the outside.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:37:48] Yeah. So I think it was. May less of an issue on the walkout because it happened so fast. That it was easy to stay on the same page because. It was sort of all consuming for a while and it was OK we're doing this. I think it gets harder as we go on because there's more time for people to start to splinter and say well no I don't like this strategy, I don't like that strategy. There's a sort of tension between having a broad coalition that's very independent and having a centralized message right you can't really have both. And I think. We're trying to navigate that of what the balance is for say the walkout out and moving forward of how.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:38:41] Because the other issue is if it's too centralized it's easy to pick off the leaders. It's easy to sort of say oh these five people are leading 20000 Googlers. If we just got rid of those five people. Then the rest would go away. And so you know I think we're still negotiating how to do that. It's all right. I wish I had an answer. I do.

**Audience Remark** [00:39:00] And to be really concrete when you say you're negotiating interest [?] that you're like regularly in touch remotely in.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:39:07] Yeah there are a lot of conversations happening some sort of amongst a few people some sort of. It's hard to have you know a huge meeting of 40 people and get something done. So that's the other issue is like how democratic should you be. Because some point you can't move forward along that way. And so you know there are lots of discussions happening. It's just trying to negotiate[?]- what we're sort of building this system. I think as we're proceeding. So yeah and.

**Audience Remark** [00:39:36] I'm an undergrad at M.I.T. in the computer science department. I sort of see our department as sort of a pipeline toward tech companies which I don't particularly like, but it's kind of true of a lot of similar departments. And I wonder if there is any power to be had in students demanding things like even before people hire us. And and what can we even do? How do we even start thinking about doing something like this?

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:40:07] Yeah. So what you could do is if you get a call from a Google recruiter. You say. I will not work for you you build Dragonfly, they're like.

**Audience Remark** [00:40:15] Incidentally. Incidentally I like my computer science. I was curious for.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:40:22] But now there is power and say I will not work for a company if it does X Y Z. It doesn't seem like it but. Tech companies are in fear of that pipeline being turned off.

**Audience Remark** [00:40:35] Is there any way to do this beyond like telling people to make individual decisions, is how can we like sort of build like power by forming organizations and perhaps intervening at the Career Fair level or something. I don't know what would.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:40:51] Definitely. I think there's a lot of different things and I would encourage to talk to other students and like other organizations around and get ideas. Something that Stanford's CS students did that was particularly powerful was an open letter where dozens and more than dozens I think it was like 100 graduate and undergraduates CS things that start at Stanford said that they wouldn't work for Amazon, I believe, while they did their Rekognition product. I think that was incredibly powerful. I think similar things that schools like [M.I.T?] would also be powerful talking to undergraduate and graduate students in CS at different universities like if M.I.T. Harvard and Stanford CS students all signed a letter together that would have immense power. I'm currently a graduate student and something that a lot of people in my cohort have been talking about is Raytheon being at our career fair. Like most people find that really appalling. And maybe if we put forward some sort of like. Minimum ethical requirements for having a seat at this career fair. Like you know there are many different actions of different scales some of like increasing risk and others that can be relatively easy. I think starting to form those networks and find like-minded students around you is definitely a good first step and any one of these sort of things. But. Yeah get involved with Tech Workers Coalition. This is I get my internal plug. [laughs]

**Audience Remark** [00:42:20] I thought also the CS Department at any of these schools were to say to these companies we're losing students because of, this crazy stuff you're doing. Shit. [inaudible]

**Audience Remark** [00:42:34] That actually goes right into my point I'm Ryan I'm not with Google I'm a software developer and member of the International Socialist Organization in Boston where I went to school at least I went to RIT. In Rochester New York is not quite the same level of prestige as MIT. That school in like all schools like this have a vested interest in maintaining what you were talking about with that pipeline of what is. Advertised I suppose as an independent bastion of learning but as you've seen come in and you're so really formed into the software developer box. So to answer your question like the student demands have power. Absolutely. I think I mean the. Historical example the May 1968

uprising in Paris was started by students and they're learning from their history right now. But I think because of the role that universities play in supplying these companies with labor like Yeah absolutely if you start a organization do they come together and say like we as students are not going to be part of this we must these demands are made you immediately are bigger than the sum of your parts and your demands are louder than if you were making it on your own. For that reason I think the question of life the balance between like decentralization Democratic organizing and a centralized organizing is really important. There's a concept that we sometimes talk about the idea so-called democratic centralism the idea behind that is that you the broadest number of people in a group that's come together either around like a single demand or a campaign of demands to have as broad as possible like discussion and debate amongst people but like make sure that a decision is made democratically. But once that decision is made the only way a group is able to know if that decision is the correct one is if everyone is a bound to it and we all have to go around this week and yell about how it didn't work later. But I think like you we can see like through like labor history like the ways that like this kind of organizing has saved. Movements like the Teamsters strikes in Minneapolis in the 1930s where like. Divide and conquer tactics didn't work because boss the Teamster bosses came after the strike committee but because of the way they organized it and the way because they included as many people in the decision making as possible when they thought they won by sweeping away strike committee and another one just popped up. There's so much more I can do.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:45:21] I just wanted to also say we wanted to keep this event like about an hour so folks still have energy to like talk to each other and network after [laughter] I wanted to hear. So. I just wanted to encourage if you had a thought and you wanted to put it out there now would be a really good time.

**Audience Remark** [00:45:44] Hi. Hi. So I'm a software engineer but I don't work at the tech company I work in a company that's not a tech company. And they're not very many of us and I work at a company where no one thinks this company ever thought, "No don't be evil," right. Like I was not a part of the DNA of the company. And I guess I mean that's that's not me I work there right. But like but is there what's the advantage to working in a place that has this at least protection toward that like. Don't be evil and I think there's a lot of tech companies that view themselves as so scrappy underdogs that are doing good in the world and what's the advantage of not working in a place like that. Can you speak a little bit about negotiating the kind of company culture at a place like Google vs. a place that maybe is not so. Ethically. Yeah. Yeah.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:46:39] Yeah. So. I mean I think a lot-of myself included-a lot of people who work at Google bought into the, don't be evil, do things that matter to improve the world. And when you recruit with that message you get people who want to do that. And so when you flip on that and say well we're sort of moving "don't be evil" down to the bottom of the document. And maybe Dragonfly isn't evil. Right. You built a cult. Its like, Well wait no, that's not what I signed up for. So I think that's part of what you're seeing is a lot of people sort of saying this wasn't what I signed up for. And I think the power and organizing to have people who have that in their DNA. I didn't just come here for a psych- a paycheck.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:47:27] I think the advantage of, you know if it's not in the DNA of the culture I think you have to be quieter maybe about how you go about it. You may not be able to tap into that like ethos of doing good. At the same time a lot of these are just smart business decisions right. If I. Go. Whether. I'm interested at. Amazon's strategy of saying

we're going to build stuff because the students are standing up and saying well I don't want to work there, are they cutting off a pipeline and can you go to your manager and be like you know. Because we're building this. People don't work for us. They don't want to buy our product. And so you can sort of. Use the business against them because there is this outside pressure.

**Audience Remark** [00:48:20] And I think this is mentioned. I saw especially recently is that at least being transparent about what you're doing means that your workers understand it. In Google it feels like Google's stated purpose is "don't be evil" but there are some aspects where you're like but that conflicts with what you're doing and it makes it harder because Googlers feel like well we know we're doing good so I'm going to give my executives the benefit of the doubt. Whereas at Microsoft they just said, no we are going to build these things or Amazon we're going to build these things. It is the type of business we are, which gives you the ability to like have those conversations with your management leadership et cetera. And at least know what you're getting into so that you can make a reasonable decision.

**Audience Remark** [00:49:07] Thank you so much for this. I guess I'm really interested in how like the Me Too movement is still having such incredible repercussions. And so I'm just wondering I was interested in the women at Google group and like when did that form how did it like change over the course of the last couple years like. Women's marches and me too? Were people talking about sexual harassment at work? In what way before this New York Times article?

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:49:43] Yeah. So the women's, the Google women engineers list doesn't exist, as long as I can remember. I've been at Google almost eight years. I think. A lot of the current events, whether it's the women's march, the Kavanaugh hearings and certainly the New York Times article. Has people telling their stories in a way that we didn't before. Right. And there's power in that. There's power in knowing. Oh wait I'm not alone. This didn't just happen to me. This happened to this other person. And in some cases the same person. So there's power sharing those stories just to say I'm not alone. I want to take action because I know that. Because it's easy to sort of sweep this under the rug and say it's not pervasive. Or it's too scary to report because that's the other problem is. This is completely underreported. And so you know giving people maybe a little more power to report. Or even just have the conversation. And. I want to say like. Essentially there's a lot of the people named in that article. It wasn't the first time they're named. Like there are whole books in which they were named. But having that complete list was important.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:51:13] And just thinking back on their employment. They were bullies. Right. They were out right bullies in public, meaning, what public within Google meetings was tolerated. And so I think part of the conversation is saying let's rewind this too. This is a bad person who's treating people poorly. Because they push boundaries. So let's have a conversation about treating people with respect first. And then maybe they don't progress to openly harassing. So I think that's part of conversation too, how we treat one another with respect. That's very important because too often you hear sort of comments that shouldn't be made about someone. So I think that's another conversation that's starting to come up of like how do we. Nip this in the bud and find these people before they harass.

**Audience Remark** [00:52:15] So I'll preface[?] by saying I'm not an engineer but I run a program on AI and ethics and we teach a lot of engineers and part of the question I have which is related somewhat to the MeToo issue which exists far outside of tech. But the other organizing, Maven, Dragonfly and I was wondering. How much you feel like. The

power some of those people were protesting had because they were engineers and kind of a finite resource that Google knew they couldn't really ostracize in the same kind of ways because they weren't replaceable. And how. Maybe that's something that needs to be leveraged now versus later when maybe I mean we teach at MIT our machine learning class now is like 300 people, before we flood the market with a lot of people who might not care as much.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:53:14] I do think we're in a position of power there. You know talk to any tech company around they can't hire fast enough. And we can use that to our advantage, the fact that OK if you fire me, one I can get employed somewhere else but, two, try to replace me. And I think it's important for us to use that power. To lift up and give voice to people who don't have that power. In particular the TVCs at Google don't have that power right. They're going to replace the kitchen staff if they speak up, replace the security guards. And so it's important for us to speak up and say, No it's not enough to give me Vicki's needs you know, don't just satisfy Vicki's needs. I need everyone's needs to be, before I shut up. And so I think it's important that we use our power but also make sure we're using it for people who are powerless.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:54:13] Something that's really struck me too is it's not just using it for but it's very much like a solidarity like we're standing up together because we're stronger in these broad coalitions than if they atomized us or just appease like a privileged sector of the workers at the company.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:54:30] Yeah I think you see that, you see the like, we're going to address the Black Googler network about black issues or we're gonna address the women about women's issues and never speaking to the fact they're people who intersect. And it's like no. Lots of times we have the same issues. If we just talk to one another and work together. Right. And so I think there's power in that, of making sure we're standing together. Because they will try to split us off like, oh well we let, look we let the women walk out and we gave them no arbitration for sexual harassment. Sit down and we'll get to the Black Googler network later. We can't do that.

**Audience Remark** [00:55:13] Hi. My name is Jill and I don't work in the tech industry but I'm here because I date someone who is. [laughs]

**Audience Remark** [00:55:21] So it's kind of like on these same lines about power and representation that are talking about as somebody who works in restaurants and I have been told oh you're not allowed to say no. That's not something you're allowed to say, which you know, it's the context of a job but you know in another context that's really messed up. You know as - I was talking to some friends there, saying well, I'm not allowed to say no to my manager either. I'm wondering at Google because they're saying that wasn't just restaurants that it's like this. I was wondering at Google. Do you feel like you have the power to say no?

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:55:56] Yes and no. [laughs] There are certain things if I say no to they're like well, Vicki, you work here, you have to do this. But to go to the power issue. There are things like I might say I am walking out on November 1st, and I'm going to speak publicly and. They could say no. They could say Vicki if you do this you're fired. And I've sort of said well, Do that right. There is a point at which because you know engineers have this power we can just say well. Do it. I do think a lot of us did get to the like, well then just fire me, I don't care anymore. And there is power in that. And I think that's why we need to stand together because we do have more of that power. Together.

**Audience Remark** [00:56:43] But I also think Google is unusual in the extent to which you can say, this is wrong. Sometimes that Google tries to offer a forum for for that. That isn't necessarily present [?] at every company doesn't mean that [?] I expect a change. But like.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:56:59] I said I think there are times when their hope is if they give us a forum will speak it all out in its own way.

**Audience Remark** [00:57:06] It doesn't really work. But right.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:57:08] So I don't want to confuse that with real power.

**Audience Remark** [00:57:13] So say no , yes. Do no, no.

**Audience Remark** [00:57:17] Judy thank you very much. So I am a tech support worker not so much behind the scenes. I mean you picture engineers coding. People are in their desks. I'm more on the front so I was wondering if there was any conversation with any customer service tech support representatives that. Either were on board or had some sort of other challenges that they had to face. Just because that's kind of what I'm looking at. I mean my I work for an educational publishing company that has a tech side. So that's who I work for. So it's not an evil company but I in in in the sense of solidarity and standing with Google workers, women, people of color. That's because that's why I would want to know how Google if if that happened at Google.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:58:07] Yeah. So. Folks in those roles at Google tend to be TVCs and so harder for them to speak up. So I don't know of any specifically, that a lot of the conversations around involving TVCs end up being very quiet in the background because we're trying to protect them because we know they're vulnerable. And so I can't speak to that specifically because a lot of that has happened very very quietly in the background.

**Kristen Sheets** [00:58:38] Although the TVCs did just put out a public letter.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:58:40] Right. Right. So that was a place where they were able to organize and then approached the walkout organizers about sort of. Forwarding it for them because they they couldn't sign a public letter. And be like, we're the twelve TVCs who wrote this. Right. Like that wouldn't have worked to this case. And so they needed this broader movement to help forward their message.

**Audience Remark** [00:59:04] Question I had was do you guys ever see any participation or any outreach from consumers, from the consumer side, or from clients as far as demands or anything related to these issues.

**Vicki Tardiff** [00:59:21] So I don't really work. I work on search which is sort of, like, deep in the bowels of search I don't work directly with consumers. I will say you saw some of that today in the [Congressional] hearing right. I think the power in not just speaking up as tech workers but as citizens and going to Congress and sort of saying, hey you need to be looking at these issues. They're broader and they need oversight. So you start to see that today and asking well what kind of data are you collecting. You know. How do I opt out. So I think that that's the consumer side are starting to speak up. And I don't know that I want Google to know if I walked across the room to quote that Congressperson.

**Audience Remark** [01:00:08] And to follow up with that. Is there a politics, is there an explicit kind of political implications for this? Do you think as far, as I mean, could that be legislation could there be? Could this be included into a platform potentially for a political candidate? I mean, what is there any other kind of ways to complement. Or to supplement what you guys are trying to do?

**Vicki Tardiff** [01:00:39] I think that. Yes that there's a role for legislation here. I don't believe that these companies are necessarily going to regulate themselves. So I think there's a role for legislation there. I have less faith in the current Congress to get that done or even know what to do. There were some alarmingly incoherent questions today, whereas like you need a tech adviser. And so. I think this is the role we have as citizens is pushing on this. Like you need to get your act together and legislate this. I think it is also a place where we're seeing the importance of CS education across. It should be part of the liberal arts because it's such a big part of society now that if you don't understand these technologies at least at some basic level, you can't speak to them. You can't legislate them. You need that in your wheelhouse. And we're seeing lack of that right now.

**Kristen Sheets** [01:01:42] Thank you guys so much for coming. It's been a real pleasure to be in. Thank you Vicki!

**Kristen Sheets** [01:01:55] Yeah. The next event that the Tech Workers Coalition is putting on is a social. It will be Jan uary 11 at Andala Cafe. We do these things called worker cafe which we just hang out of the coffee shop together get to know each other work on projects together. It's very open. We're also actively doing a project called Learning Club. I don't know when the next one will be but they're sort of collective study groups where we put together syllabuses about things we want to learn more about where our last one was on Sunday it was about Tech ethics. So it was really super informative conversation and they're also open .So if you have a Learning Club you want to put on you can propose it and work together with the Learning Club project and put it on. But there's also - the Coalition's pretty new. The Boston local is. So there's lots of room for other projects. But right now we're really trying to build like sort of like an alternative tech network. There are lots of tech networks. Where you can try to meet people and get a job but there's not a lot of them where you can talk about what's good at your job and what you actually hate about your job and wish was different. So we're trying to fill that last need.

**Audience Remark** [01:03:04] Thank you! [applause]