

Contractors who work on YouTube Music are striking



Over 40 contractors for YouTube Music are going on strike – a first at Google, according to the Alphabet Workers Union (or AWU). The action is in response to an order to return to in-person work next week, something that many of the workers say they can't do. They're demanding a return-to-work policy that's "fair, flexible, and does not threaten the safety and livelihoods of workers," according to an AWU press release.

The workers are part of the YouTube Music Content Operations team via Cognizant, a subcontractor for Alphabet, Google and YouTube's parent company. Their jobs are to "ensure music content is available and approved" for the platform, according to a prior press release from the AWU.

The objections to the return to office plan stem from pay and availability. According to the AWU, the contractors are paid as little as \$19 an hour, making it difficult to afford the relocation, travel, or childcare costs that they didn't have to pay when working remotely, instead of at an office in Austin, TX.

An unnamed spokesperson for Cognizant told *Engadget* that the return to office policy had been “communicated to [the workers] repeatedly since December 2021,” and that they had taken the positions “with the understanding that they were accepting in-office positions, and that the team would work together at a physical location based in Austin.” Google would not provide an on-the-record comment for this story, but the company has told the National Labor Relations board that it does not see the workers as its employees, according to *Bloomberg*.

The contractors are currently attempting to unionize with the AWU, which filed a petition with the National Labor Relations Board to represent the contractors in October. Last week, the AWU filed an unfair labor practice charge against Alphabet and Cognizant, claiming that the return to office was being used to “interfere with the fair voting conditions mandated by federal law,” as Sam Regan, one of the workers put it in a press release.

There have been previous organized labor actions at Google. In 2018, tens of thousands of workers walked out to protest how Google handled sexual harassment, spurred on by reports that it had paid Android co-founder Andy Rubin \$90 million in severance after he was accused of sexual assault. And in 2022, a group of Cognizant contractors working on Google Maps were able to get their return-to-office pushed back after threatening to strike.

<https://www.theverge.com/2023/2/3/23585093/youtube-music-contractors-strike-google-remote-work>