

Elon Musk begins mass layoffs at Twitter

Kevin Reed
4 November 2022

San Francisco-based Twitter began the first round of mass layoffs of its workforce on Friday under orders from billionaire owner Elon Musk, who took over the company one week ago.

Some Twitter workers received an email from the company late Thursday that they were being terminated and others found out about it when they lost access to online systems or were barred from entering company facilities on Friday.

While the new leadership of Twitter did not disclose details of the job cuts, internal documents reviewed by Reuters earlier in the week said that Musk was planning to cut 3,700 of the 7,500 global workforce.

The *New York Times* reported on Friday that “four people with knowledge of the matter,” confirmed that half of the Twitter workforce had been eliminated, adding, “Rarely have layoffs this deep been made by a single individual at a tech company.”

Tweets from former employees on Friday showed that the layoffs on Friday hit staff members in engineering, marketing, communications, product development, content curation and machine learning ethics.

Shannon Raj Singh, a lawyer who was running Twitter’s human rights department, tweeted, “Yesterday was my last day at Twitter: the entire Human Rights team has been cut from the company.”

Senior Community Manager, Simon Balmain, tweeted, “Looks like I’m unemployed y’all. Just got remotely logged out of my work laptop and removed from Slack.” In Balmain’s case, he lost access to email and other systems eight hours before being informed that he was officially laid off and he told CNN that the message he received “still didn’t provide any details really” about why he had been fired.

Multiple news outlets reported that the email to Twitter staff was terse and said different things depending on geographic location. Reuters quoted a section of one of the message which read, “In an effort to place Twitter on a healthy path, we will go through the difficult process of reducing our global workforce on Friday.”

Musk’s claims that his motivation to privately own Twitter was, “to try to help humanity” have been rapidly overtaken by a financial crisis resulting from a sudden drop in advertising revenue. Major advertisers, including General Motors, paused spending with Twitter last week because of content moderation concerns.

Interpublic Group (IPG)—which is responsible for \$40 billion in marketing internationally for brands such as American Express, Walmart, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Johnson & Johnson and Mattel—followed up GM’s announcement with a pause in ad spending until they had confidence and clarity on the direction of the platform. Other major brands that have stopped advertising include Ford, Audi, General Mills, Pfizer and Volkswagen.

The reality is that the layoffs at Twitter, accelerated by the Musk takeover, are part of the jobs massacre taking place at tech firms across Silicon Valley. As part of the intensification of the attacks on the jobs and wages of the entire working class—and with financial performance declining and share values falling on Wall Street—companies such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, Lyft, Microsoft and others have announced either a hiring freeze or layoffs of their employees.

Responding to the exodus of advertisers, Musk tweeted on Friday morning, “Twitter has had a massive drop in revenue, due to activist groups pressuring advertisers, even though nothing has changed with content moderation and we did everything we could to appease the activists.”

He continued, “Extremely messed up! They’re trying to destroy free speech in America.” Speaking at an investors conference in New York on Friday, Musk reiterated his claim that activist pressure was “an attack on the First Amendment.”

The reality is that the private takeover of the micro blogging platform—which has become a critical tool used by millions of people for instantaneous global announcements, news and information—by a billionaire oligarch is the greatest threat to democracy.

An example of the social and political outlook of Musk and the billionaire elite was demonstrated in his exchange

with Democratic Representative from New York Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on Twitter on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Commenting on a plan announced by Musk to charge users \$8 per month to continue using the “verified” account feature, the congresswoman tweeted, “Lmao [laughing my a-- off] at a billionaire earnestly trying to sell people on the idea that ‘free speech’ is actually a \$8/mo subscription plan.”

Responding to the comment with a combination of conceit and bullying, Musk tweeted, “Your feedback is appreciated, now pay \$8.” This reply speaks volumes about Musk’s commitment to democratic rights and his proclaimed desire to make Twitter into a “common digital town square.” In response to a legitimate question about the future of speech on Twitter, Musk essentially told Ocasio-Cortez—an elected member of the US House of Representatives who has repeatedly faced death threats from far-right and fascist individuals—to “shut up and pay me.”

The first week of Musk’s ownership of the social media platform with nearly 400 million monthly active users has, by any measure, been one of widespread and deepening crisis. He has used his pretense of “free speech absolutism” as a front for welcoming far-right and fascist individuals—such as offering to restore Donald Trump’s account—onto Twitter to spread racism, xenophobia, white-supremacy and antisemitism on the platform.

The mass character of Twitter, as well as social media generally as a technological phenomenon in the 21st century, is incompatible with the ownership of a single billionaire oligarch. The crisis unfolding at Twitter is part of the deepening economic, social and political crisis of the world capitalist system.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact