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Mass layoffs at Twitter, Facebook: Demand worker-community control of social media

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Billionaire bigot Elon Musk's chaotic takeover of Twitter, with more than half of the company's 7,500 workers fired and locked out, along with Facebook/Meta's subsequent announcement of mass layoffs, highlights the urgent need for worker-

community control of these communication platforms relied on by billions of people worldwide.

Musk's family fortune originated with the stolen labor power of South African mineworkers under apartheid and expanded through the union-busting Tesla auto company and military contractors Starlink and Space X. He's now thrown open Twitter's doors to fascist groups and far-right provocateurs after completing his \$44-billion buyout Oct. 27.

Among those terminated were the entire team of content moderators responsible for addressing incidents of hate speech and threats against people of color, women, trans people, and the queer community.

Twitter's protections were always inadequate and poorly enforced. But all of the measures forced on the company in the wake of the Black Lives uprising and the Jan. 6, 2020, attack on the Capitol have been swept away.

However, Twitter's "warnings" targeting media and officials from countries targeted by U.S. imperialism – including Cuba, Iran, China and Russia – remain firmly intact.

Attack on workers

[Business Insider reported](#): "Five of those laid off filed a class-action lawsuit against Twitter on Nov. 3, accusing Twitter of breach of contract and violating the WARN Act, which requires companies to alert workers prior to mass layoffs.

"An emergency motion added to the lawsuit on Wednesday alleged that, by promising that the workers would get at least a severance package if laid off after the acquisition, Twitter 'had persuaded employees not to seek or obtain employment elsewhere during the uncertain time period prior to Musk's purchase of the company.'

“After Musk’s plans to buy Twitter were first announced in April, ‘many Twitter employees’ asked management about the changes that this would bring to the company, ‘in particular about mass layoffs,’ the former workers said.”

Those who initiated the lawsuit were among the first fired by Musk. But overnight on Nov. 3-4, up to 3,700 more Twitter workers [found out that their jobs were gone](#) – not from an official announcement, but because they were locked out of their Slack accounts and other company platforms.

The ripple effects have just begun.

“After laying off half its staff earlier this month, Twitter on Saturday [Nov. 12] started culling its vast ranks of contract staff, [sources confirmed to Axios](#).

“Like many companies, Twitter’s staff is made up of a mix of full-time employees as well as contract workers who work for a third party. Twitter has cut an unspecified number of contractors in various fields, including content moderation, sources confirmed. ...

“Some contractors, meanwhile, are concerned about getting paid for the last two weeks as a number of contractors ended up on teams with no full-time Twitter employees, leaving no one to sign off on their time cards, sources tell Axios.”

Tech industry mass layoffs

Musk’s theatrics have gotten the lion’s share of headlines, but the entire tech industry is in the midst of a deep crisis that it is taking out on the backs of its workers and users dependent on their platforms.

“Tens of thousands of tech workers have been laid off within days, as tech giants including Meta, Twitter, Salesforce and others shed headcount going into the final stretch of the year,” [CNBC reported](#) Nov. 10. “At least 20,300 U.S. tech workers

were let go from their jobs in November, and more than 100,000 since the beginning of the year, according to Layoffs.fyi, which tracks layoffs in the field.”

On Nov. 9, Meta – the parent company of Facebook, the world’s largest social media platform with 2.9 billion users, Instagram and WhatsApp – announced [more than 11,000 layoffs](#), about 13% of its global workforce.

Facebook has been losing ground to Twitter, TikTok, and other social media platforms. Mark Zuckerberg, chairman, and CEO of Meta, sunk enormous amounts of capital into developing virtual reality software that has been ridiculed for being inferior to widely-available VR gaming systems.

On Nov. 14, the [New York Times broke the news](#) that Amazon plans 10,000 layoffs, or 3% of its global workforce, in “Amazon’s devices organization, including the voice-assistant Alexa, as well as at its retail division and in human resources.”

Although known primarily as the world’s biggest online store and for the sweatshop conditions of its warehouse and delivery workers, Amazon has its hands in many pots – from grocery chain Whole Foods to the robotics industry to a major social media platform, Twitch. AWS (Amazon Web Services) has tens of billions in contracts with the Pentagon and the National Security Agency.

“As per [a] Bloomberg report, Amazon became the world’s first public company to lose a trillion dollars in market value as a combination of rising inflation, tightening monetary policies and disappointing earnings updates triggered a historic selloff in the stock this year,” [Mint reported](#).

Ride-share app company Lyft plans to cut 13% of its workforce. And the list goes on.

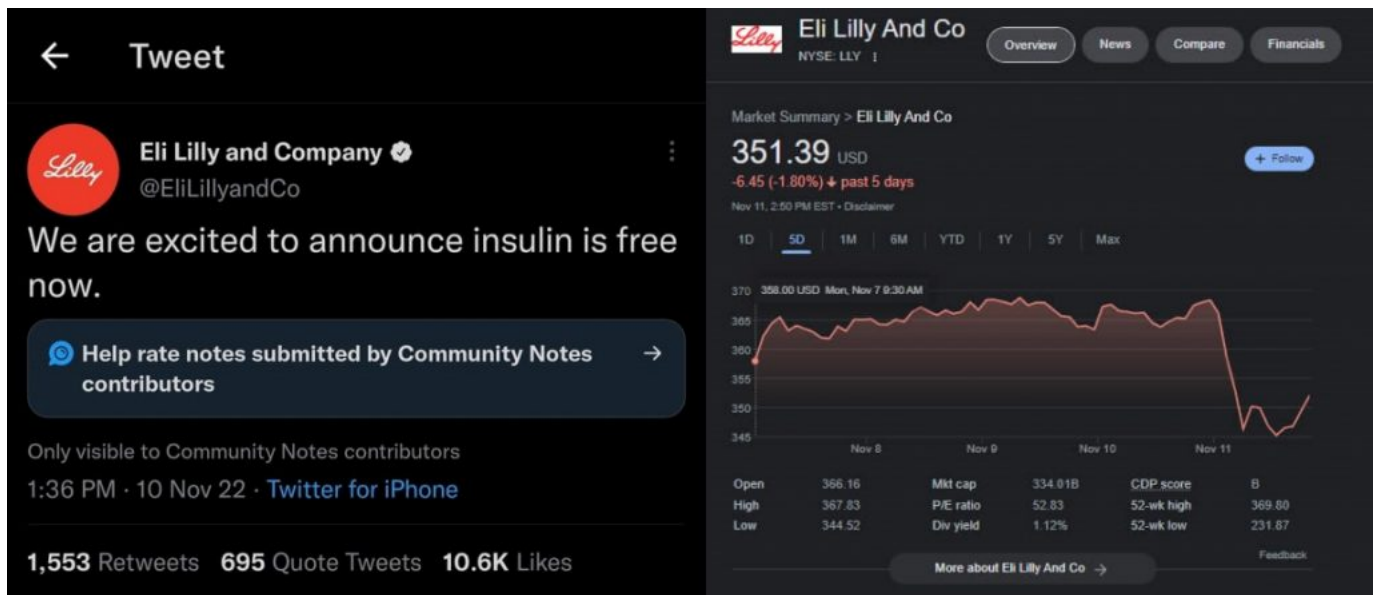
Tech workers aren’t the only ones who will be affected. The ripple effects will hit manufacturing, delivery, restaurant and healthcare workers, to name just a few, as the U.S. economy spirals toward a new capitalist recession.

Workers, communities unite!

Already some of Musk's schemes have laughingly backfired – such as his plan to do away with the Twitter verification system for public figures and companies by charging \$8 a month for a “blue check” verification.

Within hours of implementing the system, Twitter was flooded with bogus “verified” accounts, such as one for pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly. The company's stock crashed after a parody account tweeted that the company would hereafter make its lifesaving insulin free. (Insulin should, of course, be free.)

As a result of Musk's verification scheme and the proliferation of hate speech, advertising giant Omicron – representing huge brands like McDonald's and Apple – urged its clients to pause Twitter advertising, [Reuters reports](#). So far, General Motors, Volkswagen, and United Airlines are among the companies that have [pulled their advertising](#).



Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (owned by Google) have become the most important form of communication for billions of people worldwide.

Workers, their families, and oppressed communities – especially young people – rely on them not only to stay in touch with each other but often as their main source of news and information.

The current wave of union organizing efforts at Starbucks, Amazon, and other giant chains has used Twitter and other social media to build public support and spread the word to workers around the country. Likewise, Black and Brown-led groups and antifascists have used them to get out the word about right-wing attacks and to organize resistance.

Elon Musk has made a special target of oppressed communities on Twitter, such as the trans, nonbinary, gender-nonconforming, and intersex community. For years, many vulnerable and isolated groups and individuals have used the platform to build community and seek support and affirmation. Musk has blamed them and “civil rights groups” for the hit to Twitter advertising revenue since his takeover.

The impact goes far beyond U.S. shores. The importance of these platforms for the world’s population is reflected in the emphasis Washington has put on appointing censorship boards to silence the voices of media and organizations critical of U.S. sanctions and military adventures worldwide.

Elon Musk’s takeover and impending mass layoffs across the tech industry show that it is long past time that Twitter, Facebook and similar platforms were made publicly owned utilities under the control of their workers and the communities they serve, here and worldwide. Let’s raise the demand: social media by and for the people!

