

Letters to the WSWS

4 May 2000

Dear WSWS,

I very much enjoyed reading your May 3, 2000 article on John McCain's visit to Vietnam. I fully agree with the author that the last thing Vietnam needs is moralizing from the elected officials of a country that committed numerous crimes in Vietnam and the rest of Indochina. There were, however, two inaccuracies in the article that merit mentioning:

(1) The author comments that the US "defoliated half the country." This is an exaggeration. Yes, large areas of the country, particularly in the south and central regions, were defoliated, but not half the country.

(2) The author also comments, "Vietnam is desperately poor, but it nonetheless maintains educational facilities that exceed those of many richer countries. Nearly 90 percent of the adult population is literate, a figure far higher than most other less developed countries in Asia and higher than many American states." These statements are also inaccurate or misleading. To begin with, the Vietnamese educational system is in a near state of collapse given that the government is broke and has very little money to put into education. Facilities, even at the country's best universities, are frequently in terrible shape, there is virtually no money for research, quality texts are often hard to come by, teachers get paid a pittance forcing them to frequently work more than one job, and the charging of many fees to go to schools now has also erected further barriers to education for many Vietnamese. Schools in the rural areas are often in even worse shape. With regard to the literacy rate, which the government has for decades boasted about, and with good reason, many people have mastered a level of literacy, but given that many only stay in school for a few years, the possession of literacy does not necessarily entail that they are able to adequately defend themselves or articulate their desires to the state or its officials (in dealing with laws, contracts, or regulations, for example), or that they have the skills and knowledge needed to assume good paying jobs that could help them escape their poverty. Even the Vietnamese government has recently acknowledged the disjuncture on this latter point. The literacy rate is laudable, and Vietnam is a wonderfully literate society, but educational reforms and improvements are desperately needed if the country and its people are to break out of their cycle of poverty.

Thanks for keeping Vietnam and its concerns in the news.

Yours,
SM

3 May 2000

I want to thank you for publishing one of the best articles I have ever read, namely Mike Ingram's "The Microsoft law suit, software development and the capitalist market." While the facts of these matters have been reported elsewhere, few others have been able to present them from such a sound perspective or provide such a shrewd analysis. I have made a donation to your site in hope of supporting articles as insightful as this one in the future.

Thanks very much,
GW

3 May 2000

Dear Editor:

I was glad to see that WSWS also have a concern on the social issue of software development. Indeed it is one of the important issues facing socialist thinkers of the 21st century.

Nevertheless, I want to point you (or the author Mike Ingram) to look at a explanatory page available on GNU.org web site on the distinction of "Open Source" and "Free Software." [URL: <http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/free-software-for-freedom.html>] In your article you use the term "open source" software to denote the mode of software production that is "open" and "free," however, on the page that I mentioned to you previously, Richard Stallman, the founder of GNU project, seems to differentiate what he think as the socially progressive mode of software production ("Free" Software) from what you used in your article.

I also suggest you read a recent discussion about the difference between "Open Source" and "Free" software on slashdot.org. [URL: <http://slashdot.org/interviews/00/05/01/1052216.shtml>] Richard seems to think that while the "Open Source" software, a term used liberally by the software industry, is available and compatible with the for-profit tendency of the capitalist market, the "Free" software resist them.

It is my sincere hope in the future the WSWS can explore more on the issue of software development and the Internet. I also hope the WSWS can establish an open dialog and public forum with software users and developers on those issues.

At present, the Internet seems to be used primarily by the capitalists as a tool to enrich themselves. I hope this trend will reverse and the Internet will become a tool for social change.

Best regards,
SL

3 May 2000

Hello,

As someone who reads the articles on the *World Socialist Web Site* every day, I wanted to contact you regarding your article on obesity.

I generally agree with what you said in that article. Only in the very last part I think you said something wrong, and yet if it's not totally wrong, then it's at least a bad selection of words.

You said: "And technology has the potential to free humanity from work ..."

What you most likely wanted to say is that technology can potentially make work easier. This is definitely true. But the sentence in the way you wrote it suggests that technology will replace humans at work, and thus humans no longer have to work but can do other things.

This is certainly not what you meant to say. Only technocrats would say that technology *should* totally free humans from work, and from the various books I've read I know that Trotsky opposed this point of view.

The problem is something else: Technology should be used for the benefit of the whole population. Thus, it is a good thing if technology can make work easier. You have correctly stated in your article that technology itself is not necessarily bad, but the way it's being exploited by the capitalists is the real problem. A capitalist would never employ technology to make work easier for his employees. The only reason why capitalists employ technology is in order to increase the productivity of their employees. So a capitalist's use of technology is dictated by the benefits he gets himself out of its use, not by the benefits for his employees.

So, what you really wanted to say in your article was most likely that technology can be a very helpful tool in getting work done, but not as long as the capitalists possess it. I agree with you that if the technology was under the control of the workers it could be used wisely and would be very helpful, but when I say that, I always point out that I oppose the views of technocrats who think they can totally substitute human workers with machines. This is *not* what you (and me) are fighting for.

Thanks for reading my thoughts and greetings from Germany!

NH

29 April 2000

Good points in this article. I wish you would also look into the business of added hormones in the meat supply and a hidden phenomena of today, the increase of premature sexual development in female children.

Sincerely,

MM

29 April 2000

The article, "Obesity: a curable Epidemic," was very interesting, but lacks some useful understanding, especially from a corporate vs. worker point of view. Some great sources

of information on this can be found in abundance in recent Feminist sources, particularly poignantly explicated in Naomi Wolf's book, *The Beauty Myth*, where she particularly analyzes the connection between the \$30 billion diet/beauty/fashion industry and its need for buyers. And as well driving women in particular into mental, emotional, physical and financial slavery both to feed the industry in particular, but also to be used in a capitalist system for cheap, underpaid labor.

Sources such as The Healthy Weight Journal discuss both from a medical and social perspective how dieting (starvation) resets metabolism lower (starvation syndrome), *increasing* body fatness and increasing the likelihood of increased profits again and again from dieting. This metabolic lowering can be genetically passed on as well. Thus, from this point of view, it is understandable how in only a few generations of dieting alone, fatness has increased profoundly. As well, factors such as consumption of convenient junk/fast foods, and inadequate exercise, supported heavily through advertising, have played their role too. And, sadly, whole, fresh foods are always more expensive than prepared "junk".

Yet, while there is no known published diet that works, there are many risks to dieting, including among others—heart disease! As well, a whole set of medical "facts" regarding obesity's dangers are being called into question by such sources above, documenting the extraordinarily poor and untruthful information generally coming out of "obesity research". While some health complications do exist on the far end of the obesity scale, there are surprisingly fewer problems truly associated with being overweight. These "medical" myths are propagated as a camouflage for corporate interests in the diet/fashion/beauty industry, and as a means to keeping women, in particular, feeling ashamed of their bodies. A downtrodden population makes great slaves and our underpaid cheap labor is desperately needed.

Thanks for the opportunity to share this.

WB

30 April 2000



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact