

Open Letter from WSWS Chairman David North to Alphabet Chief Executive Officer Sundar Pichai

31 July 2020

Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Alphabet
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai:

I am writing in response to your testimony on Wednesday, July 29, before the House Committee on the Judiciary, at its hearing on “Online Platforms and Market Power, Part 6: Examining the Dominance of Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google.”

Replying to a claim by Congressman Greg Steube (Republican of Florida) that Google’s online algorithms are exclusively censoring conservative political views, you said the following: “We do get complaints across the aisle. For example, the World Socialist Review complained in January of this year that their site wasn’t found in Google search results. So, we get complaints, we look into it, but we approach our work in a non-partisan way, and it is in our long-term incentive to serve users across the country.”

Although you did not go into the details, your statement was clearly a reference to an article published on January 20 of this year by the *World Socialist Web Site*, titled “Google suppressing World Socialist Web Site content in its search results for the New York Times’ 1619 Project.” It is evident that the WSWS’s allegation was discussed at the highest level of your company.

The January 20 article stated that Google was suppressing in its search results the highly popular articles published by the *World Socialist Web Site* on the *New York Times Magazine*’s much-publicized racist falsification of American history called “The 1619 Project.”

We pointed out that the authoritative and original series of articles, interviews and analysis published by the WSWS on the 1619 Project were being read by hundreds of thousands of people around the world and that there were a growing number of backlinks to this material from social media and major online publications such as the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Atlantic*, *National Review* and the *Daily Signal*. However, in searches for the “1619 Project,” this content was being pushed by Google deep into its link results.

This is not the first report of online censorship by Google from the *World Socialist Web Site*. On August 25, 2017, I sent an open letter to the executive leadership at Alphabet and Google at the time—yourself, Lawrence Page, Sergei Brin and Eric Schmidt—calling for an end to the blacklisting of the *World Socialist Web Site* in Google search results.

Since that time, the *World Socialist Web Site* has published numerous articles about the expansion of internet censorship, including suppression of progressive and socialist ideas on social media platforms, and the increasing demands of both the Democrats and Republicans for government control of online information in the name of combatting “fake news” and unsubstantiated claims of “foreign interference.”

The fact that you referred specifically to the WSWS complaint in your congressional testimony speaks to the seriousness with which the matter was taken. You, the CEO of Google’s parent Alphabet, were notified of the complaint. Six months after the article was published, it remained fixed in your memory.

Your testimony did not deny the charge that we have made that Google is suppressing the articles and

analyses of the *World Socialist Web Site* in search results. In the context of the hearing, your cryptic reference to Google working “in a non-partisan way” may be interpreted as an attempt to justify your company’s censorship practices by claiming that they are applied against both left-wing and right-wing web-based publications.

Moreover, you told the House committee, under oath, that when Google gets a censorship complaint, you “look into it.”

If this, in fact, is company policy, why was the *World Socialist Web Site* never informed that its claim of suppression was being discussed within Alphabet/Google management, or that an investigation was being conducted into our complaint?

Therefore, I request answers to the following questions:

- When did the investigation into the WSWs complaint of censorship begin?
- Who authorized and participated in the company’s investigation?
- What department or departments of the company were the subject of the investigation?
- Was Ben Gomes, the corporate vice president responsible for Google’s search operations, interviewed as part of the investigation?
- When was the investigation concluded?
- What were the evidentiary findings of this investigation?

I await your reply.

Sincerely,

David North

Chairperson, International Editorial Board

World Socialist Web Site



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact