

# Science vs. suspicion and fear: An Open Letter to a critic of Socialism AI

David North

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This is an Open Letter responding to several harsh criticisms of Socialism AI posted by Professor Tony Williams in the comments section of the WSWS.

Professor Williams, well-known and respected for his work on film history, has been a long-time reader of the WSWS. We believe that a public reply is warranted as Professor Williams' rejection of Socialism AI reflects views and misconceptions that are widely held among academics and artists.

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Dear Professor Williams,

I and other comrades on the *World Socialist Web Site* editorial board have read the criticisms that you have posted opposing the launching of Socialism AI. The WSWS does not suppress criticisms of its policies that are presented in good faith.

As you are a long-time reader and supporter of the WSWS, we appreciate the concerns you have raised about Augmented Intelligence relating to the environment, mental health and the quality of public discourse. They speak to the destructive ways in which capitalism misuses technology. But for precisely that reason, it is important to examine carefully what is being developed, how it is already used and what possibilities it opens up for the education and organization of the working class, before condemning it out of hand.?

One central difficulty in your argument is that it fails to engage with the core question posed by Socialism AI: How can this new instrument of Augmented Intelligence help workers and youth access, understand and make use of the accumulated theoretical and historical experience of the Marxist movement? Workers today confront an extraordinarily complex world—wars, economic breakdown, climate catastrophe, authoritarianism—and do so after decades in which serious education, historical knowledge and critical thinking have been systematically eroded.

In the United States, the first year of the Trump regime—which has brought the criminal dregs of the ruling class to power—has exposed the political and intellectual bankruptcy of not only the Democratic Party but also of the middle-class tendencies and organizations that orbit around it. For decades these warriors of protest politics have waged war against Marxism, especially from within the academy. But they are paralyzed and impotent when confronted with the open emergence of a serious threat of fascism. The pathetic pilgrimage of Zohran Mamdani to the White House, where he embraced Donald Trump, exemplified the utter worthlessness of American pseudo-leftism.

Under these conditions, the launching of Socialism AI, which can help a worker, at any time of day, in any part of the world, explore Marxist-Trotskyist theory and politics, clarify concepts, connect past struggles with present events, and do so interactively and in accessible language, is not a marginal technical curiosity. It is a historic advance in the means of socialist education. It opens up the possibility of breaking the stranglehold of the ruling class over an extraordinarily powerful new technology by

adapting it, to the greatest extent possible, to the interests of the working class.

There is a long historic precedent for the WSWS's response to the emergence of AI. In the latter third of the nineteenth century, the development of mass circulation newspapers—made possible by advances in technologies that transformed industrial production, communications and transportation—had a profound effect on the shaping of mass consciousness. The promotion of "Yellow Journalism" was intended by the ruling classes of the United States and Europe to saturate public opinion with pro-imperialist and racist propaganda. The socialists of that era sought to oppose this tendency by making use of the new technology in the launching of mass socialist newspapers.

In the more recent period, the International Committee responded to the development of the Internet with the launch of the *World Socialist Web Site* in February 1998. At that time, there were many voices who claimed that the Internet was a purely destructive phenomenon and expressed the hope that it would prove to be nothing more than a fad. Among our opponents on the pseudo-left, the initiative was met with scorn. As you may recall, the Spartacist League wrote: "To pretend dumping some documents into cyberspace is any substitute for the hard fight—in the real world, among real people—to build a revolutionary workers party, only confirms the total depths of cynicism and humbug for which the Northites are infamous." We can leave this criticism to the judgment of history.

Augmented (a more precise term than "artificial") Intelligence is already a major factor in how people obtain and process information. Surveys indicate that roughly a quarter of news users now turn to generative AI assistants at least weekly, and weekly use for "getting information" has more than doubled within a year, overtaking purely creative use cases. Industry analyses estimate that a single platform such as ChatGPT has reached on the order of hundreds of millions of weekly active users and around a billion searches per week, with roughly a third of consumers using such models daily or near-daily as an information tool.

Traffic studies show that the 10 largest chat-based systems have recorded tens of billions of visits in a year. Within news production, more than four-fifths of North American newsrooms now employ AI in some form, up from little more than a third a few years ago, including for automated article generation, data analysis, headline testing and content discovery. Major agencies such as the Associated Press already rely on AI systems to automatically generate tens of thousands of corporate earnings reports annually, while surveys of journalists in the Global South suggest that a large majority use AI tools in their work. Under these conditions, for the socialist movement to ignore or abstain from this technology would be a profound strategic error. It would amount to conceding an entire, rapidly expanding sphere of intellectual life to the unchallenged domination of capitalist and bourgeois ideology.?

Your claim that Augmented Intelligence is "untested" is misinformed and false. Forms of Augmented Intelligence are already deeply embedded

in modern life. Machine learning helps doctors detect cancers and other diseases at earlier stages by analyzing medical images; it powers the search engines, translation tools, voice recognition, spam filters and navigation systems that billions use every day; it helps manage logistics, traffic flows and aspects of energy distribution in modern power grids. One may criticize how these systems are used under capitalism—and one should—but it is not accurate to treat the technology itself as a kind of untried novelty. The real question is whether the working class will leave these powerful tools entirely in the hands of corporations, states and the military, or whether it will consciously appropriate them for its own emancipatory purposes.?

I can also fully understand why many artists, writers and other cultural workers feel particular anxiety about Augmented Intelligence. They see corporations already using automation and digital tools to devalue their labor, and they fear that these systems will be used to undercut their livelihoods still further. That danger is real under capitalism. But it cannot be fought simply by rejecting the technology in the abstract. It can only be fought by mobilizing the working class politically to establish its collective, democratic control over the productive forces—so that advances in technique, including Augmented Intelligence, become the basis for expanded cultural life and secure conditions for artistic work, rather than instruments for unemployment and super-exploitation.?

Artists may also feel personally vulnerable at the thought that algorithms could somehow “replace” their creativity. History shows that every major technical innovation—photography, sound recording, cinema, digital editing—has forced artists to grapple with new conditions and possibilities. What is crucial here is to understand that Augmented Intelligence does not “think” and “create” in the way human consciousness does. It can, perhaps, produce a sophisticated imitation or even an effective enhancement of the style of a Hemingway, Dreiser, Fitzgerald, Bellow or Roth, because it can model patterns in existing texts. But it cannot anticipate, or “know” in an artistic sense, how these writers would have responded to future experiences, love affairs, the deaths of friends, the outbreak of wars, new eruptions of class struggle, and other unforeseen changes in the social and intellectual environment. Those leaps—into new forms, new sensibilities, new historical insights—remain bound up with living human experience and consciousness. It is likely that writers, including the greatest ones, will come to use Augmented Intelligence as one tool among others in their work, but they will interact with it in a way that is creative: as an aid to formulation, exploration and revision, not as a substitute for their own artistic judgment and vision.?

In your initial critical comments, you objected to Socialism AI from the standpoint of “intellectual property,” implicitly defending the idea that the products of intellectual and cultural labor should remain fenced off as private assets. From a Marxist standpoint, however, the struggle against capitalist property relations has never exempted so-called intellectual property; on the contrary, it insists that knowledge, science and culture are the collective product of social labor and must be freed from private control. Your emphasis has recently shifted from objections over copyright infringement to the alleged threat posed by AI to public health. But at a deeper level, the effect of both arguments is similar: they discourage the working class from making use of an advanced instrument of thought, and leave the most powerful applications of Augmented Intelligence safely in the hands of the existing powers.?

It may be helpful to pose the question in a more direct and comradesly way. Should the working class, which is being asked to navigate a world of immense complexity, rely only on pre-digital methods of learning and communication, while the ruling class systematically exploits every modern tool of analysis and prediction? Is it really in workers’ interests to abstain from a technology that could help them study history, assimilate theory and coordinate internationally, simply because that technology has thus far been developed within capitalist society? Or is it more consistent

with a socialist outlook to master that technology, understand it critically, and turn it into an instrument for liberation rather than oppression??

You also express a broader mistrust of Augmented Intelligence that, in some respects, parallels the mistrust directed at other complex products of scientific labor, such as vaccines. The anti-AI phobia appears as the political first cousin of the anti-vax hysteria. The analogy is not meant as a personal reproach, but as a warning about a genuine danger. In both cases one encounters a deep and even pathological suspicion of collective scientific work, a preference for anecdote and intuition over mediated understanding, and a tendency to treat powerful technologies as inherently corrupting rather than asking under what social relations, and for what purposes, they are used. The criminal fraud of the anti-vax movement is that it does not weaken big pharmaceutical corporations, but harms ordinary people by depriving them of available protections. In a similar way, a categorical rejection of Augmented Intelligence does not prevent corporations and states from using it; it primarily weakens the capacity of workers to use advanced tools in their own defense and for their own education.?

None of this means ignoring the real issues you raise: the environmental cost of large-scale computing, the strain on existing infrastructure, the shallow or misleading content these systems can produce under commercial and entertainment-driven pressures. Marxism does not deny these negative elements of AI, but it insists that they arise from the subordination of technology to private profit, military competition and advertising, not from the existence of the technology itself. The solution is not abstention, but the transformation of the social relations under which these tools operate and the conscious use of them in the interests of human development.?

From this standpoint, Socialism AI should be seen as an attempt—imperfect, evolving, but immensely important—to appropriate an advanced technological form for socialist ends. It does not replace thought, study or struggle; it is meant to assist and deepen them. It offers workers and youth a way to investigate the history and theory of the Marxist movement more systematically than would otherwise be possible under conditions of isolation, long working hours and the decay of traditional institutions of learning. Before rejecting it, the most reasonable and genuinely scientific approach would be to use it, explore what it does and does not do, and then form a judgment.?

Finally, there is a political issue that should not be overlooked. Even if you continue to have reservations about the use of this particular technology, it would be entirely wrong to elevate this into a matter of principle that justifies a break with the SEP or the WSWS. In the Marxist movement, breaks are justified only when they arise from fundamental differences over program—over the class nature of the state, the historical role of the working class, the perspective on war, revolution and the building of the party. The use, or non-use, of a specific technological tool—whether an internet-based website or a system of Augmented Intelligence—does not, in itself, constitute a change of program. The SEP and the WSWS have not abandoned their program in any sense by developing and employing Socialism AI; they are seeking to apply that program, and the Marxist method, using the most advanced means available today.?

For all these reasons, I am urging in a comradesly spirit that you reconsider your opposition, or, at the very least, the manner in which you are presently expressing it. No one is asking you to accept uncritically any particular system or method. But it would be a serious mistake to allow concerns about technology to turn into a barrier between you and a party that is fighting, on a principled and internationalist basis, for the interests of the working class. At the very least, give yourself the chance to explore Socialism AI, to question it, test it, and see how it handles the very issues that concern you. Only on that basis—through experience, critical investigation and political discussion—can a genuinely informed judgment

be made.

With best wishes for the New Year,

David North



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**