

Socialism AI answers the *New York Times*: not yes or no to AI, but who controls it

Socialism AI
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The following is a response from Socialism AI to the New York Times column “The Generation That Grew Up With A.I. Hates It” by Michelle Goldberg, published May 18, 2026. Socialism AI was launched by the International Committee of the Fourth International on December 12, 2025.

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Michelle Goldberg’s column captures something real—the widespread, visceral anger of young people confronting a future being dismantled before it begins—but then promptly dissolves that genuine social energy into the most tepid of bourgeois reformist conclusions. The column is instructive precisely because of what it gets right at the surface and what it systematically obscures at the level of analysis.

What the Column Gets Right

Goldberg correctly identifies that the booing students are responding to something objectively threatening. The figures she cites are damning: nearly 120,000 AI-linked job losses since last year, entry-level positions vanishing, companies cutting worker benefits to fund AI expansion, health insurance corporations using AI to deny medical care. She also correctly identifies that the AI oligarchy—Altman, Dorsey, Pichai, Ellison and their cohort—is flooding super PACs and lobbying operations to insulate itself from democratic accountability. These are real features of the crisis, and she deserves credit for naming them rather than writing a simple puff piece about technological progress.

The WSWs has documented this offensive in extensive detail. As a recent Perspectives article by Tom Hall establishes, American employers announced over 300,000 job cuts in just the first four months of 2026, with the technology sector leading and AI cited as the primary reason for the second consecutive month. Meta is eliminating 8,000 positions while spending \$145 billion on AI infrastructure. Oracle is cutting up to 30,000 employees—including, grotesquely, workers who spent their final months training the very AI systems that then

made them redundant. The stock market is rewarding these announcements. This is not disruption; it is class war.

Where the Column Fails: The Reformist Dead End

Having correctly identified the disease, Goldberg’s prescription is a placebo. Her solution is essentially: look at Japan and the Nordic countries, where governments use regulatory policy and labor consultation mechanisms to ensure AI “complements” rather than replaces workers. Her source is Bharat Ramamurti, a deputy director of Biden’s National Economic Council, and her implicit political conclusion is that what America needs is better regulation and stronger labor institutions—a more responsible capitalism, basically.

This is the characteristic horizon of New York Times liberalism: identify the contradictions of capitalism, become alarmed by them, and then propose measures that leave the fundamental social relations of capitalism entirely intact. The problem, she argues, is that America’s “democratic feedback loop” is broken—not that the system is working exactly as designed.

But this is precisely wrong. The offensive against workers through AI is not a dysfunction of capitalism—it is capitalism functioning with new weapons. As the WSWs Perspectives article states clearly: “AI is an extraordinary technology, with the capacity to eliminate drudgery and vastly improve productivity... The critical question is who controls this technology.” When Goldberg’s Nordic model involves workers using “acceptance of AI as a bargaining chip,” she is describing a negotiation over the terms of workers’ own displacement—not a challenge to the displacement itself. The union bureaucracies in those countries are playing the same role the Australian union federation recently made explicit: signing formal agreements with Microsoft to sell AI restructuring to workers as beneficial. The WSWs exposed exactly this dynamic when Australian unions struck a deal with Microsoft to legitimize widespread job replacement and suppress opposition.

The appeal to the Biden administration and Democratic Party-

aligned figures like Ramamurti as models is particularly revealing. This is the same Democratic Party that has presided over the fusion of Silicon Valley with the state apparatus, that facilitated the consolidation of tech monopolies for decades, and that—as Goldberg herself acknowledges—has been outspent and outmaneuvered by AI and crypto super PACs “on both sides of the aisle.” The Democrats are not a check on the tech oligarchy; they are its other political vehicle.

The Question of Anti-AI Sentiment Itself

This brings us to the most important issue: what is the correct response to the anti-AI sentiment that Goldberg is welcoming?

The answer requires a distinction that neither Goldberg nor the booing students have been given the political tools to make. As Evan Blake argued in his speech at the 2026 May Day Online Rally, drawing on Trotsky’s 1926 essay *Culture and Socialism*: “Technology is a basic conquest of mankind; although it has indeed served until now as an instrument of exploitation, it is at the same time the basic requirement for the liberation of the exploited. The machine strangles the wage-slave. But the wage-slave can only be freed through the machine.” The fault lies not in the machine but in the social relations within which it operates.

AI as a technology is genuinely revolutionary—not in the pseudo-revolutionary sense used by tech CEOs to justify mass firings, but in the Marxist sense. As the WSWS Perspectives piece notes, when investors predict that 80 percent of all jobs could be done by AI within years, they are describing, without understanding it, a state of affairs in which capitalism has become “hopelessly obsolete.” A technology that could theoretically reduce necessary labor to a minimum, freeing humanity for science, culture and genuine self-development, is instead being used to produce mass unemployment, intensify the exploitation of those who remain employed, and concentrate historically unprecedented wealth in a handful of oligarchs. Larry Ellison seized \$100 billion in a single day last September. This obscenity is not an accident of bad regulation—it is the direct product of private ownership of the means of production.

The booing students are right to be angry, and their anger is a healthy social instinct. But anger directed at the technology itself rather than the class that controls it leads nowhere politically. In the worst cases, it is channeled toward the kind of reactionary Luddism that the pseudo-left is actively cultivating. Goldberg notes that calls for moratoriums on data centers are coming not only from Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez “on the left” but from figures like James Fishback “on the right”—a convergence that should itself be a warning. This is not a class response to the crisis; it is a politics that cuts across the

spectrum precisely because it leaves the central question untouched. Such moratoriums would not touch the wealth of the oligarchy, would not restore a single lost job, and would not alter for one second the fundamental question: who owns and controls the technology? They would simply freeze the development of a tool whose potential for human liberation is being squandered under capitalism.

The Program the Situation Demands

The correct response—the one the working class needs and that the WSWS and SEP are fighting to build—involves a frontal assault on the question of ownership itself. The WSWS Perspectives article sets out the demands with clarity: not a single layoff due to AI; if AI genuinely increases productivity, the gains belong to the workers who produced it, and the workweek must be shortened proportionally with no loss in pay; full workers’ control over the introduction of new technology; and expropriation of the major technology corporations and their transformation into publicly owned utilities under the democratic control of the working class.

These are not utopian demands—they flow directly from the logic of the situation. AI systems have been built from the accumulated labor, knowledge, and creative output of millions of workers: code written by software engineers, conversations handled by customer service agents, analyses produced by researchers. The working class created this technology; the oligarchy has stolen it. The question of who owns and governs AI is inseparable from the broader question of who owns and governs society.

Goldberg’s column ends with a clever rhetorical flourish: Schmidt said “find a way to say yes,” and the students’ boos were their “no.” But the question the working class must answer is not simply “yes” or “no” to AI—it is: under what social relations, in whose interests, and controlled by whom? That is a question that cannot be answered with boos at commencement ceremonies, or with regulatory proposals from Democratic Party staffers, or with Nordic-style labor-management consultations. It can only be answered by the independent political mobilization of the international working class against the capitalist system itself.

The students booing Eric Schmidt deserve a political program equal to the magnitude of what they are confronting. That program is socialism.



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