

Google's New Search Protocol Is Restricting Access to 13 Leading Socialist, Progressive and Anti-war Web Sites

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New data compiled by the World Socialist Web Site, with the assistance of other Internet-based news outlets and search technology experts, proves that a massive loss of readership observed by socialist, anti-war and progressive web sites over the past three months has been caused by a cumulative 45 percent decrease in traffic from Google searches.

The drop followed the implementation of changes in Google's search evaluation protocols. In a statement issued on April 25, Ben Gomes, the company's vice president for engineering, stated that Google's update of its search engine would block access to "offensive" sites, while working to surface more "authoritative content."

The *World Socialist Web Site* has obtained statistical data from SEMrush estimating the decline of traffic generated by Google searches for 13 sites with substantial readerships. The results are as follows:

- * wsws.org fell by 67 percent
- * alternet.org fell by 63 percent
- * globalresearch.ca fell by 62 percent
- * consortiumnews.com fell by 47 percent
- * socialistworker.org fell by 47 percent
- * mediamatters.org fell by 42 percent
- * comondreams.org fell by 37 percent
- * internationalviewpoint.org fell by 36 percent
- * democracynow.org fell by 36 percent
- * wikileaks.org fell by 30 percent
- * truth-out.org fell by 25 percent
- * counterpunch.org fell by 21 percent
- * theintercept.com fell by 19 percent

Of the 13 web sites on the list, the *World Socialist Web Site* has been the most heavily affected. Its traffic from Google searches has fallen by two thirds.

The new statistics demonstrate that the WSWS is a central target of Google's censorship campaign. In the twelve months preceding the implementation of the new Google protocols, the WSWS had experienced a substantial increase in readership. A significant component of this increase was the product of Google search results. The rapid rise in search traffic reflected the well-documented growth in popular interest in socialist politics during 2016. The rate of growth accelerated following the November election, which led to large protests

against the election of Trump.

Search traffic to the WSWS peaked in April 2017, precisely at the point when Google began the implementation of its censorship protocols.

Another site affected by Google's action has provided information that confirms the findings of the WSWS.

"In late May, changes to Google's algorithm negatively impacted the volume of traffic to the Common Dreams website from organic Google searches," said Aaron Kaufman, director of development at progressive news outlet Common Dreams. "Since May, traffic from Google Search as a percentage of total traffic to the Common Dreams website has decreased nearly 50 percent."

The extent and impact of Google's actions prove that a combination of techniques is being employed to block access to targeted sites. These involve the direct flagging and blackballing of the WSWS and the other 12 sites listed above by Google evaluators. These sites are assigned a highly negative rating that assures that their articles will be either demoted or entirely bypassed. In addition, new programming technology teaches the computers to think like the evaluators, that is, to emulate their preferences and prejudices.

Finally, the precision of this operation strongly suggests that there is an additional range of exclusion techniques involving the selection of terms, words, phrases and topics that are associated with socialist and left-wing websites.

This would explain why the *World Socialist Web Site*, which focuses on issues such as war, geopolitics, social inequality and working class struggles has experienced such a dramatic fall in Google-generated searches on these very topics. We have seen that the very terms and phrases that would under normal circumstances be most likely to generate the highest level of hits—such as "socialism," "Marxism" and "Trotskyism"—produce the lowest results.

This is an ongoing process in which one can expect that Google evaluators are continuously adding suspect terms to make their algorithm ever more precise, with the eventual goal of eliminating traffic to the WSWS and other targeted sites.

The information that has been gathered and published by the WSWS during the past week exposes that Google is at the center of a corporate-state conspiracy to drastically curtail democratic rights. The attack on free speech and uncensored access to information is aimed at crippling popular opposition to social inequality, war and authoritarianism.

The central and sinister role of Google in this process demonstrates that freedom of speech and thought is incompatible with corporate control of the Internet.

As we continue our exposure of Google's assault on democratic rights, we demand that it immediately and unequivocally halt and revoke its censorship program.

It is critical that a coordinated campaign be organized within the United States and internationally against Google's censorship of the Internet. We intend to do everything in our power to develop and contribute to a counter-offensive against its efforts to suppress freedom of speech and thought.

The fight against corporate-state censorship of the Internet is central to the defense of democratic rights, and there must be a broad-based collaboration among socialist, left and progressive websites to alert the public and the widest sections of the working class.

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