Google’s censorship and blacklisting of the World Socialist Web Site and other left-wing and anti-war web sites was the subject of a lengthy article published by the New York Times on September 27. Titled “Google as Traffic Cop,” it was placed prominently on the front page of the printed edition of its Business section and posted on the newspaper’s web site.

Written by Times reporter Daisuke Wakabayashi, who specializes in issues related to technology, the article begins: “When David North, the editorial chairman of the World Socialist Web Site, noticed a drop in the site’s traffic in April, he initially chalked it up to news fatigue over President Trump or a shift in political consciousness.

“But when he dug into the numbers, Mr. North said, he found a clearer explanation: Google had stopped redirecting search queries to the site. He discovered that the top search terms that once brought people to the World Socialist Web Site were now coming up empty.

“This is not an accident,” Mr. North said. “This is some form of deliberate intervention.”

Mr. Wakabayashi initially contacted the WSWS several days after the publication on August 25 of North’s Open Letter to Google’s CEO and other leading company executives. The letter, which included extensive data proving that Google was seeking to exclude the WSWS and other left-wing sites from search results, demanded an end to censorship and blacklisting.

While the Times has carried reports that Google had restricted access to extreme right-wing sites, Mr. Wakabayashi’s article is the first substantial report within the US establishment press of corporate censorship of left-wing sites.

Research by the WSWS has found that search traffic to 13 left-wing, anti-war, and progressive sites has fallen by 55 percent since Google announced changes last April to its search algorithm.

Following North’s initial discussion with Wakabayashi, the WSWS provided the Times reporter with extensive data backing its claim that the dramatic fall in search traffic coming from Google was attributable to a decline in the position of articles by the WSWS in search results.

In late September, shortly before the article’s publication, Wakabayashi conducted a second interview with North.

The article accurately reported the findings of the WSWS.

“In mid-April, a Google search for ‘socialism vs. capitalism’ brought back one of the site’s links on the first results page but, by August, that same search didn’t feature any of its links. The site said 145 of the top 150 search terms that had redirected people to the site in April are now devoid of its links.”

In his interview with Wakabayashi, North urged the Times reporter to ask Google to present a fact-grounded response to the analysis of the WSWS:

“They should be asked to explain how they’re doing it,” the Times quotes North as saying. “If they say we’re [Google] not doing anything, that’s simply not credible.”

The Times reporter attempted to obtain a response from Google but received no reply. “Google declined to comment on the World Socialist Web Site,” the article reports.

Google’s total silence is tantamount to an admission
Wakabayashi’s article also referenced the Open Letter’s charge that Google searches favor establishment sites.

“Mr. North argued the drop-off in traffic is the result of Google directing users toward mainstream news organizations, including The New York Times. The World Socialist Web Site claimed that search referral traffic had fallen since April at a variety of other left-wing, progressive, socialist or antiwar publications like AlterNet and Consortiumnews.”

During the month he was researching the article, Mr. Wakabayashi apparently uncovered no evidence disproving the claims of Google censorship. Rather, his own research provided support for the findings of the WSWS.

For example, the New York Times found that while search engine traffic to the WSWS was down, non-search traffic was up.

“I’m against censorship in any form,” North told the Times. “It’s up to people what they want to read. It’s not going to stop with the World Socialist Web Site. It’s going to expand and spread.”

The Times’ publication of this report on Google’s effort to censor and blacklist the World Socialist Web Site and other left-wing sites is a politically significant development.

In response to the Times article, David North issued the following statement:

“The WSWS’ exposure of Google’s attack on democratic rights is being widely followed and is having a substantial impact. The article that appeared in the Times was in preparation for a month. Its own research confirmed that traffic to the WSWS has fallen dramatically. When asked by the Times to answer our allegations, Google chose to stonewall its reporter. If Google had been able to refute the WSWS, it would have provided the evidence to Mr. Wakabayashi. It failed to do so because our charges are true. Google is engaged in a conspiracy to censor the Internet.

“Google’s effort will fail. Awareness is growing rapidly that core democratic rights are under attack. Google is discrediting itself as its name becomes synonymous with manipulating searches and suppressing freedom of speech and critical thought.

“The World Socialist Web Site will not retreat or back down from this fight. We are confident that our fight against government and corporate-sponsored censorship will continue to gain support.”