

## WN *Editorial*

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### *Attitude*

## **Standing up and taking sides**

Here now at the end of this year we, the editorial team, affirm some of the principles and purposes of our journal. Since its foundation in May 2010, *WN* has maintained a broad view of public health and of nutrition. In recent years much has changed. The picture is bigger and the outlook is darker. We take a lead from WHO director-general Margaret Chan. On 15 September she [\*addressed the WHO European regional committee\*](#) of senior international civil servants in Vilnius, Lithuania. Two of her themes were ‘the globalised marketing of unhealthy products’, and the prevention of childhood obesity. She also made general statements and asked challenging questions of a type too often absent from official UN sources:

Many of the risk factors for non-communicable diseases arise from the behaviours of multinational corporations... In 2011, more than 60% of the world’s 175 largest economic entities were companies, not countries... Who really governs the policies that shape our health? Is it democratically elected officials working in the public interest? Is it multinational corporations working in their own interest? Or is it both? That is, governments making decisions that are heavily influenced by corporate lobbies.

Are these issues that should be addressed in journals such as ours? We believe so, yes. On 10 June 2013 Margaret Chan addressed a [\*world conference on health promotion\*](#) in Helsinki, Finland. There, as is now well known, she again spoke truth to power:

It is not just Big Tobacco anymore. Public health must also contend with Big Food, Big Soda, and Big Alcohol. All of these industries fear regulation, and protect themselves by using the same tactics, [which] include front groups, lobbies, promises of self-regulation, lawsuits, and industry-funded research that confuses the evidence and keeps the public in doubt. Tactics also include arguments that place the responsibility for harm to health on individuals, and portray government actions as interference in personal liberties and free choice. This is formidable opposition. Market power readily translates into political power. Few governments prioritize health over big business. As we learned from experience with the tobacco industry, a powerful corporation can sell the public just about anything.

Should these dark tactics be recognised, confronted and denounced by public health and nutrition professionals, and by concerned citizens? Again, we say yes, and see the [lead Update story on current sugar taxation](#) battles in the UK and in Mexico.

What follows are notes towards a stated philosophy, developing [the original manifesto of W<sup>N</sup>](#), published in our first issue. Conscious people now have a better understanding of some of the root causes of states of health, and so are more radical in their thinking and actions. Similarly, events since the 2007-2008 world financial crash, and plausible predictions for the next fifteen – and fifty and more – years, lay imperative duties on public-spirited publications. These include exposing the political, economic and commercial forces whose ideology and activities are sabotaging public health, public goods, and public life. This is not a time to keep quiet.

### ***Ally***

Our journal has attitude, which is to say a decided, consistent point of view. Also, we ally – we work in alliances. Our contributors, advisors and supporters include investigators from universities and research centres, international and national civil servants, other policy-makers and opinion-formers, representatives of public interest organisations and social movements, and authors and journalists.

We will continue to publish findings based on attested scientific methods, and also discussion and judgement of public policy positions [such as the editorial on the Global Nutrition Report](#) in this issue. We will also continue to publish theses, findings and ideas that are visionary, challenging or disturbing. This is normal in public health discourse. In selecting and editing contributions, we aim to be decisive and clear, to address you as a reader with a serious sustained personal or professional interest in and commitment to protection of public health and improvement of nutrition.

### ***Amplify***

Our editorial policies and practices follow a principle of amplification. This includes taking a broad view of health as personal and population well-being, emotional and spiritual as well as physical. It also involves the social, economic, political and environmental drivers of states of health of humans, the living and physical world, and the biosphere, and inclusion of ethics, evolution, ecology, and other relevant fields of knowledge.

Amplification also implies encouraging our authors to write plainly and clearly, and presentation that uses vivid projection and illustration. [An example in this issue](#) is the commentary by *W<sup>N</sup>* regular contributor Ted Greiner of Hanyang University, South Korea, that opposes the current UN-supported strategy of universal supplementation of young children with massive doses of vitamin A in capsule form. This follows – and amplifies – [‘The great vitamin A fiasco’](#) by former professor of international nutrition at Cornell University Michael Latham, in the first issue of *W<sup>N</sup>*.

### ***Advocate***

Our contributors typically are advocates for the public good. Statements like the [Giessen Declaration](#) issued from the University of Giessen, Germany, often cited in *W*N, are acts of advocacy. Our *Food System* series has resulted in *W*N being cited in UN and other influential documents. Its advocacy is now developed into the *NOVA* food classification, used as a basis for the new official Brazilian dietary guidelines and for a [Pan American Health Organization report](#). It celebrates shared meals made with fresh food, and rejects solitary snacking on packaged products. The distinguished nutrition scientist and editorial team member Carlos Monteiro of the University of São Paulo, Brazil, leader of the project, states in [Update in this issue](#):

True foods and freshly prepared dishes should be made more attractive, accessible and affordable, and ultra-processed products less competitive. Good and sound information, and also regulations, are needed. Brazilian manufacturers resisted our food guide, and there will be even more blowback against any policy that touches on taxation or marketing of their products. We hope that our food guide gains more social support that will counteract the manufacturing, catering and marketing businesses, the media, and all entities that make money from ultra-processed products.

### ***Activate***

A colleague once suggested that *W*N is liked by activists but disliked in the official world. We do have some inveterate critics, though a good number of international civil servants who advise us agree with strong stands taken by our contributors, and some privately urge us on. *W*N is a committed journal, in the classic tradition of progressive public health. This is not a time to be passive.

Activism goes further than advocacy. It follows through and seeks solutions. It typically involves solidarity. Activists make plans, and decide, and speak out. One of many current examples is the fight to secure and increase taxation on sugared drinks and on ultra-processed products in general, [whose leaders include senior academics](#) from all round the world. All of us who are committed to the protection and strengthening of public health and public goods are engaged in a global conflict, facing massive forces. These include transnational corporations effectively united in strategies designed to displace long-established appropriate and sustainable food systems and supplies, and thus to obliterate dietary habits and patterns that are an intrinsic part of convivial family and social life, meaningful culture, and rewarding employment.

### ***Agitate***

Now for a stronger term. Some professionals see themselves as advocates but resist being seen as activists. More agree that they are activists, but not agitators. ‘Agitator’ is associated with images of anarchists in black cloaks that conceal smoking bombs. But the term has a positive significance. It originated in the 17th century English Civil War. Officers in the armies massed against regal tyranny were charged to

enlighten their troops in discussion of how to achieve equity, justice and democracy. They were called ‘agitators’ because their task was to stir up consciousness. [\*A defining characteristic of agitation is direct action.\*](#) Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and Mohandas Gandhi, who all led marches against gross injustice, were for this and many other reasons, agitators.

### ***Whose side we are on***

We on the editorial team are on the side of all communities, organisations, institutions and citizens committed in good faith to the public good, and who are prepared to fight conscientiously to achieve a world fit for future generations. During the life of *WN*, we have been educated and enlightened by social movements that act bravely and directly to demand justice. An example is *El Poder del Consumidor* (Consumer Power), whose direct actions, Greenpeace-style, backed with compelling evidence, have alerted Mexican citizens, radicalised academics, and pressed legislators to see the outrageous impact of sugared soft drinks, or soda (such as Coca-Cola) [\*on rates of diabetes.\*](#) and to stand up against Big Soda. See our commentaries in this issue by activist academic Marion Nestle and investigative journalist Tina Rosenberg on [\*Soda Wars.\*](#) Another example is [\*La Via Campesina,\*](#) some of whose views are expressed in this issue by contributor [\*Flavio Valente,\*](#) secretary-general of FIAN International:

The peoples of the world must call on states to reject corporate capture and to reaffirm peoples’ sovereignty and human rights as a fundamental step to addressing all forms of inequity, oppression and discrimination, and to democratise national and global societies. Peoples must hold their governments, and through them the intergovernmental spaces, accountable for the implementation of their national and extraterritorial human rights obligations.

To keep quiet now would be passively to support disgrace, disaster, and eventually even catastrophe. Written words can encourage or support righteous action and agitation. These can include stirring speeches, consciousness-raising, and standing shoulder to shoulder with oppressed communities, as well as banners, marches, denunciation and mobilisation.

In Vilnius Margaret Chan also declared, with reference to corporations that subvert science and seduce children: ‘We will need to have the weight of public opinion, sometimes even outrage, on our side’. She is right. Cool, calm and co-ordinated rage has ensured that the tax on sugared soft drinks remains in force in Mexico, [\*as stated in Update in this issue.\*](#) We at *WN* support governments determined to protect their people. We applaud UN leaders who remain courageous. We work with the growing forces of health professionals actively committed to ethical principles of social responsibility. We affirm our solidarity with organisations and movements whose members stand up and fight for justice and equity in world, national and local affairs.

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