

**New Internationalist**

The people, the ideas, the action in the fight for global justice

# Mobile phones

New Internationalist Easier English wiki

Ready Lesson

Intermediate

# This lesson:

- Speaking
- Reading
- Vocabulary
- Writing

# Phones: which phone is best and why?

- **cost**
- **appearance**
- **speed**
- **memory**
- **storage and memory**
- **camera**
- **other features**
- **.... anything else?**

# What's the problem with phones?



‘Should you buy an ethical smartphone?’

This (above) is the title of the article you’re going to read.

Discuss:

a) **What is an ‘ethical smartphone’?**

b) **Should you buy one – why? / why not?**

Read part 1 of the article:

1/ Does the author think you should buy a smart phone?  
2/ Why? / Why not?



If you have enough money to buy an 'ethical' phone, you might feel proud and say other people are wrong to buy Apple, Samsung and Sony phones. But buying 'ethical' phones will not change anything for most electronics workers who work for the big bad companies. And if the solutions are expensive, this does nothing to get more support for the movement for workers' rights.

Electronics workers often earn too little, work too many hours, work with dangerous chemicals that cause cancer and cannot organise a union and fight for better conditions because they are afraid of abuse or losing their job.

The big companies won't improve conditions for workers. We can see this from the many worker protests in China. China has more electronics workers than most other countries and there are many reports of people working in unsafe health conditions or in forced labour: at Dell, HP and Apple, workers have to work to pay back debts from the 'recruitment fees' they had to pay to get their job.

This is why we need to start creating our own solutions to change these systems, working with the workers.

This means more than just choosing to buy from 'ethical' firms. They sell phones to very few people, compared to the big companies eg. Apple sells phones to about 40 % of people in the world. We need to challenge all companies to agree to workers' rights – not have small spaces for workers' rights and not worry about the others.

If we work together, not as individual consumers, we can have a real impact on workers' rights in the industry. The cost of one laptop or mobile phone is very small compared to the money businesses and public institutions spend: UK universities spend between £3 and £12 million each year on electronics. Public institutions are powerful and could really affect workers' rights in the electronics industry. The public sector buys one in five computers in Europe – in 2007 that was €94 billion, and it is a lot more money now. If buyers work together, they can use their collective buying power to make all the companies listen and change.

# Vocabulary – match:

1/ recruitment

2/ rights

3/ working conditions

4/ trade union

5/ migrant workers

6/ guaranteed

minimum wage

7/ work schedule

- a) The hours you need to work for one day or week
- b) People who come from another area or country to work
- c) The lowest amount of pay you can earn
- d) Where and how you work eg. how safe or healthy it is
- e) The process of finding someone for the job and hiring them
- f) Something you should be able to do, morally or legally
- g) An organised group that fights for better working conditions and workers' rights

# Now read Part 2:

3/ What do 'Electronics Watch' and similar do?

4/ Are they successful?

5/ Why? / why not?



Electronics Watch started in 2015. It helps public institutions eg. Transport for London, University of Durham, Barcelona and Utrecht city councils, to improve workers' rights in the electronics industry worldwide. Electronics Watch does independent research and shows the real working conditions. They then negotiate with the companies to make improvements. They improved working conditions in factories employing 100,000 workers last year. They organised a guaranteed minimum wage for temporary indirect workers and reduced weekend work at a factory in the Czech Republic; and they ended the practice of making Chinese students work in factories that were not related to their subject in order to graduate. Electronics Watch has also been working with workers and other organizations around the world to raise awareness of and try to stop the use of cancerous chemicals in electronics production.

Electronics Watch and other similar organisations are effective because they are organised by workers and are independent of the companies. This means they listen to and investigate the problems of the workers. And workers are involved in finding solutions to their problems. If the companies who buy the electronics give support, workers can start trade unions so they can fight for their rights.

We need to force big electronics companies to make changes until they all have and respect trade unions. It is very important that this research is independent. Big companies often say that workers do not work more than 12 hour a day and that they know their work schedule weeks in advance. But only an independent organization can check this and see if workers agree this is true. Workers need to feel safe to join a trade union and safe to tell their stories. The organisation needs to respect that their story is confidential and check that conditions improve.

The Migrant Workers' Rights Network in Thailand found that Burmese migrant workers had to give up their passports when they arrived in the country and had to pay a lot of money if they wanted to leave. Electronics Watch made sure the workers got their passports back and money back. They need to continue to watch what is happening to make sure this does not happen again.

If we check working conditions with these independent organisations, and work together with workers, we can improve workers' rights for all, not just for a few in a few small companies. The Mobile World Congress is on in Barcelona now. The world is looking at all the new electronics. But if technology can improve so quickly, we should demand that workers' rights improve too.

# Write a formal letter to an organisation you know (company, school, college etc)

- Tell them about Electronics Watch and what they do
- Suggest they use Electronics Watch or similar to buy all their electronic equipment in future
- Use at least 4 of the new vocabulary items:

Vocabulary – match:

- 1/ recruitment
- 2/ rights
- 3/ working conditions
- 4/ trade union
- 5/ migrant workers
- 6/ guaranteed minimum wage
- 7/ work schedule



# Homework:

Read more from the

## **New Internationalist Easier English wiki:**

- about ethical gold:

[https://eewiki.newint.org/index.php?title=Is ethical gold possible%3F](https://eewiki.newint.org/index.php?title=Is_ethical_gold_possible%3F)

- about ethical fashion:

[https://eewiki.newint.org/index.php?title=Standing up against unethical fashion](https://eewiki.newint.org/index.php?title=Standing_up_against_unethical_fashion)

- or about trade unions:

[https://eewiki.newint.org/index.php?title=Issue 495](https://eewiki.newint.org/index.php?title=Issue_495)

