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How inequality blights your life.

See pages 6-7

Why and how to oppose Prevent

Patrick Murphy discusses how socialists should respond to the Government’s Prevent strategy.

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Join Labour!

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LET THEM IN

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Tunisia has been rocked by a series of major demonstrations across the country and sparked protests for jobs and democracy that spread quickly across the country and sparked the Arab Spring.

By Dan Katz

Tunisia’s unemployed rise against poverty

Tunisia has rocked by a series of major demonstrations by unemployed workers.

Protests began in the interior town of Kasserine following the death of 28 year-old Rida Yahyaoui. He was electrocuted after climbing a transmission tower in a protest after he failed to get a government job.

Action spread through the heartlands of Gafsa and Sidi Bouzid and on to the capital, Tunis, and other coastal cities.

Following Islamist terror attacks against tourist targets last summer the economic situation has worsened. There are now 700,000 unemployed in a country of under 11 million.

The union federation, Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT), supports the protests. They declared, “the ruling elite’s failure to achieve the hopes and expectations of Tunisians [has led to mass discontent].”

The government has used riot police and tear gas against the workers and imposed a curfew.

Prime Minister Habib Essid who heads a coalition government has referred them to mass discontent. “Encourage illegal activities and prevent violations of the constitutional order.”

Other laws have obstructed the registration of “new religions” and prevented them from acquiring land and building permits. This has benefited the religious monoply enjoyed by the Russian Orthodox Church, described by Putin as one of the two “pillars” of national and state security.

Putin: a model of reactionary politics

By Anne Field

The report of Britain’s official Owen Inquiry into the 2006 murder of former Russian security service agent Alexander Litvinenko was published on 21 January. It attributed responsibility for the murder to Russia’s President Vladimir Putin.

Putin ruled Russia as its President from 2000 to 2008. Barred by the constitution from seeking a third successive term of office, Putin was nominally Prime Minister between 2008 and 2012. In reality, he remained the ultimate source of authority in Russia.

Amid widespread allegations of ballot-rigging, Putin was re-elected President for six years in 2012. (The presidential term of office had been increased from four to six years while Putin was Prime Minister). He is already on record as saying that he will seek re-election in 2018.

Putin’s rule has been based on “siloviki” (strongmen): former KGB agents and serving agents of the police and the FSB (the Russian successor to the KGB), and former and serving military commanders.

According to a survey carried out by Olga Kryshryanovskaya in 2004, “siloviki” constituted around 25% of Russia’s political elite, and over 50% of Putin’s inner circle. Their influence has continued to grow since then.

Putin himself is a former KGB agent. But, as Kryshryanovskaya wrote: “Putin brought ‘siloviki’ with him. But that’s not enough to understand the situation. The whole political class wished them to come. There was a need of a strong arm, capable from point of view of the elite to establish order in the country.”

One of Putin’s first acts was to incorporate the regions into seven new federal districts.

The districts are run by appointees personally selected by Putin as his representatives. They have control over the armed forces, the budgets and activities of the regional governors in their districts.

Five of the first seven appointees were “siloviki.” At the same time Putin weakened the powers of the Federation Council, the upper chamber of the Russian Parliament with representation from the country’s different regions.

Putin also scrapped the election of regional governors (they too were to be personally appointed by Putin) and empowered local legislatures (dominated in practice by Putin’s supporters) to sack popularly elected mayors.

Over the past decade and a half potential sources of opposition to Putin’s rule in civil society have been attacked, one after another.

The media empires run by the oligarchs Vladimir Gusinsky and Boris Berezovsky were both effectively taken over by Putin and their owners deported to Russia.

Dissident journalists have been sacked, programmes critical of Putin have been taken off the air, and attempts to create independent television channels blocked by the government. The only surviving independent channel is now run from an apartment in Moscow.

Under a law signed off by Putin in 2014, international organisations, foreigners and Russians with dual citizenship will be banned from owning mass media outlets by the end of 2016. Its main target is Velospost, jointly published by the Financial Times and the Wall Street Journal.

The internet in Russia is controlled by the government agency Roskomnadzor, created in 2012. Russian bloggers with 3,000 or more visitors a day have to register with Roskomnadzor, reveal their identities, and verify the accuracy of their blogs.

Roskomnadzor can also block websites which “refuse to follow Russian laws”, which carry “extremist” political content, or which “encourage illegal activities and participation in public events held in violation of the established order.”

Foreign-funded non-governmental organisations (NGOs), described by Putin as “jackals” and “Judas”, have been singled out for repressive legislation.

They are required to register as “foreign agents”, submit quarterly reports on their funds and resources, and submit six-monthly reports on their personnel and activities. They are also subject to mandatory audits and can be fined for publishing anything not described as having been published by “a foreign agent”.

In the spring of 2013 alone, 2,000 NGOs, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, were raided by government authorities.

After a wave of protests at Putin’s decision to seek re-election as President in 2012, he increased fines for taking part in unauthorised protests to 300,000 rubles, and fines for organising such protests to a million rubles.

In 2013 Putin ramped up the penalties yet again. Repeated participation in unauthorised protests now attracts a penalty of up to a million rubles and up to five years of forced labour or prison.

A law passed in 2013 banned the “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships to minors”. Breaches of the law could result in fines or imprisonment. The following year another law banned all swearwords in films, on television and in theatre performances.

And last year new rules for licencing the showing of films were introduced, banning films which “defile the national culture, pose a threat to national unity, and undermine the foundations of the constitutional order.”

Other laws have obstructed the registration of “new religions” and prevented them from acquiring land and building permits. This has benefited the religious monopoly enjoyed by the Russian Orthodox Church, described by Putin as one of the two “pillars” of national and state security.

The TUC is also claiming victory over the issue of the double threshold for key industries. Previously the government had said that ancillary staff in key industries (as well as the main staff) would be subject to a requirement of 50% minimum turn out and 40% yes vote of all members eligible to vote, in order to organise a strike.

Documents presented to the Lords have dropped the reference to ancillary staff in these industries.

This is far from winning a right to strike and we must continue urgent campaigning.

- Join Right to Strike activities during the TUC’s Heart Unions week — bit.ly/rtsofa
- Unite Scotland votes to back “illegal” strikes — bit.ly/1RKydjY
Why and how to oppose Prevent

By Patrick Murphy

In February 2015 schools, local authorities and colleges in the UK became subject to something called “the Prevent duty”. Under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, this was a legal duty “have regard to the need to protect people from being drawn into terrorism”.

In this age of high-stakes monitoring and the tyranny of Ofsted, that “duty” led to frequent cases of over-anxious staff reporting perfectly innocent behaviour as if it were dangerous.

The Prevent programme itself was introduced by the last Labour government in 2006, in response to the 7/7 London bombing, and driven by the concern that atrocities were the work of “home-grown” terrorists. At the time it was part of a four-pronged anti-terror strategy: “Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare”.

In 2006 the strategy was focused exclusively on Islamist terrorism and based on the principle that terrorism was a decisive category between extremist ideology and violent acts. The strategy relied heavily on funding Islamic groups such as “moderate” and able to act as a counterweight to the “extremists”.

FUNDING

In 2009 the focus narrowed to target Al Qaeda and the funding increased.

At the same time an attempt was made to widen the definition of extremism to include “promoting Sharia law or failing to condemn terrorism to include non-Muslim groups, and in particular the far right. Funding was withdrawn from so-called “moderate Islamic” groups, on the entirely unfounded basis that some of them were promoting the same ideology as the “extremists”. So-called “British values” became the litmus test for everything that jihadists or extremists went unseen. Even now the references to the far right appear fairly faint.

Many initiatives developed as part of Prevent increase the level of surveillance in our society, by encouraging people to spy on and suspect the worst of each other, or by the misuse of local state power. Prevent funds were used to fund all the CCTV cameras in central Birmingham.

The strategy is open to political abuse. Once its approach is embedded the state can easily recalibrate it to target direct action environmentalists, anti-fascists and the larger movement.

Prevent undermines the relationships many public service workers, especially teachers, have with their communities, students and young people, and thus cuts against teachers gaining trust and being able to re-educate young people tempted by terrorist ideologies.

Without doing anything significant to stop recruitment to terrorist ideologies, the Prevent strategy introduces or exacerbates a whole set of other problems. It should be withdrawn.

Socialists, however, should acknowledge that there is a real problem of jihadi-terrorist recruitment. There are useful ideas in the NUS handbook, but major weaknesses too.

Against Prevent it proposes we ally with the self-styled “human rights NGO” CAGE. Omar Rani explained the problems with that in an article in Solidarity 390.

Prevent paid for CCTV in Birmingham

New blow to South Wales steel town

By Frances Jones

Over 1000 jobs will be cut at Tata steel sites across the UK, including 750 jobs at one of its largest sites in Port Talbot, South Wales. For the workforce of around 4,000, this is a devastating blow.

Port Talbot’s iconic works dominate its coastal landscape. The local economy is dependent on steel production and it is estimated that for every job at Tata, another job in the wider area is supported.

There is a gloomy feeling among residents of my hometown. We’re used to bad news; job cuts have become an all-too-frequent occurrence — the works employed residents of my hometown. We’re used to bad news; job cuts have become an all-too-frequent occurrence — the works employed many of their own families, but they’re also devastated by the damage to the town’s proud, working-class, industrial identity.

Workers at the site are fed up with bosses who’ve played a smoke and mirrors game — in recent months bosses have hinted at job-cut announcements and have exaggerated the poor financial situation at the works. Equally, they’ve been let down by their union — the Blairite Community Union — which, unsurprisingly, has done little to fight management on the cut. It would seem that in the current consultation, Community will only negotiate with management on which jobs will go, rather than on stopping the cuts altogether.

The steel crisis in steel has been caused mainly by Chinese “dumping” of cheap steel which steel production in the UK cannot compete with. The Tories have pretended to take action, but they’ve mainly hidden behind ostensibly prohibitive EU regulations. Such regulations haven’t stopped countries like Germany and Italy intervening to stop job cuts. To add insult to injury, it looks likely that the navy will use non-UK sourced steel to build a fleet of new ships.

Many now see this as a fight for life, as the end of the steel works will equate to the death of the town. Political action is desperately needed to subsidise energy costs, stop dumping, enforce procurement — much cheaper actions in the short term than the potential economic damage in closure of Tata Steel Port Talbot might have on the area.

We need to save steel jobs and stop UK industry taking yet another blow while the Tories stand by.
Expropriate the banks, not go for AES!

On this day

By Cathy Nugent

In 1986 Murdoch, working closely with the Thatcher government, set out to smash the print unions. Knowing how Murdoch did that is essential to understanding how he became a feared and feted establishment figure.

Murdoch began his domination of media business in the UK with the acquisition of the News of the World in 1968, followed by the Sun (1969), then the Times and Sunday Times (1981).

Soon after acquiring the Times/Sunday Times, Murdoch pushed through major staffing cuts and a wage freeze. A year later Murdoch went for further redundancies among clerical staff.

At that time there were two main print unions, the National Graphical Association (NGA) and the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades (SOGAT). Printers in Fleet Street, then the base of the national press, were viliﬁed as “overpaid”. But during the post-war boom newspapers were happy to see wages rise — it was a way of putting pressure on each other as competitors.

The print unions in Fleet Street had established a degree of workers’ control. They won and maintained a “closed shop” (100% unionised labour in production areas). They were conﬁdent enough to stop the newspa¬pers in support of other workers. During the miners’ strike the Sun’s picket line was so strong that the government had to bring in the army to deal with News International. In return for not taking further action, the company would not take further action and any money due will follow shortly.”

Murdoch’s plan from the start was to move all his titles and operations to Wapping, to derecognise the unions in the process, and to sack all the workers if they showed any resistance.

While Wapping was being built and equipped, Murdoch invented an entirely fictitious plan to produce a new paper, the London Post, at the plant. In September 1985 he told the unions that he would not negotiate on terms and conditions at Wapping for his older titles until an agreement was reached on terms for the London Post.

But in September 1985 news broke (via Socialist Worker) that, with the help of the EETPU in Southampton, News International was recruiting scab labour to work at Wapping.

Murdoch’s terms and conditions for the fictitious London Post were: no union recognition; no “closed shop”; complete ﬂexibility of working; new technology to be introduced at anytime followed by job cuts; the company’s right to manage. The union leaders carried on negotiating even though it was now clear that Murdoch was out to smash the unions.

In January 1986 a ballot was held by NGA and SOGAT, returning big majorities for strike action. But on 23 January Sun journalists, brieﬂy bribed with £2,000 per head, voted by 100 to 8 to transfer to Wapping. Times and Sunday Times journalists would follow.

Journalists eventually lost union recognition at the Murdoch press.

FRIDAY 24 JANUARY

At 6.40pm on Friday 24 January the strike began. Twenty minutes later, as striking staff were escorted off the Fleet Street premises, they were given a letter saying “Your employment has ended, your P45 and any money due will follow shortly.”

Murdoch had everything ready to roll at Wapping and the high-walled, barred wire surrounded plant was always going to be difﬁcult to picket. Crucially, drivers employed by TNT were used to transport printed pa¬pers, and they were told by their union, the TGWU, as it faced a High Court injunction against secondary action, to cross the picket line.

Many activists got involved in the strike, but the rank-and-ﬁle had little or no control over negotiations. The idea of a strike com¬mittee was not discussed in SOGAT until September, was opposed by middle ranking of¬ﬁcials, and voted against.

The far left, trade unionists and Labour Party members turned out in force for the massive Wednesday and Saturday night pickets at Wapping. This specially organised marches during the year. Support groups were set up.

As in the 1984-85 miners’ strike, the police were mobilised to break the printworkers, and they deployed all their weapons: riot police, mounted police, arbitrary arrests and trumped up charges. Such was their overwhelming presence that the Wapping area became a mini-police state. But Wapping residents organised solidarity and protests about the police behaviour. And pickets were a place for the left and labour movement to congregate and, as in any major struggle, to discuss political ideas.

In March SOGAT’s assets were sequestered and the union was ﬁned £25,000 for in¬structing its members in wholesale distribution not to handle Murdoch’s newspapers. From then on SOGAT leader Brenda Dean focused on doing what she had to do to get back control of the funds — i.e. selling out the dispute.

What was really needed was escalation of the industrial action — by other print work¬ers on other newspapers. Union members in democratic decision-making meetings called for such an escalation. But it did not happen. Instead, the union relied on a completely ineffective consumer boycott campaign.

In October, when Murdoch sent individual “pay oﬀ” offers to strikers, the unions, slow to respond, did not stop many individuals from taking the money.

In January 1987 Brenda Dean agreed to a deal with News International. In return for some concession the union had already voted against the company would not take further action in the courts against SOGAT. The national exe¬cutive called off the strike. The NGA was forced to follow.

Rupert Murdoch and his ilk remain what they have always been, people who bring insecurity and misery into the lives of working-class families; they are for screwing the workers and, if it helps them sell newspapers, screwing the rest of the world too.

When print workers took on Rupert Murdoch

by Dave Osland

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Rupert Murdoch and his ilk remain what they have always been, people who bring insecurity and misery into the lives of working-class families; they are for screwing the workers and, if it helps them sell newspapers, screwing the rest of the world too.
EU’s limited unity is at risk

The European Union — the optimistically titled “ever closer union” — is under great strain.

After the collapse of European Stalinism in 1989-91, the EU had a run of success, and expanded to 28 states, with up to 10 more waiting to join. Drunk with capitalist triumphalism, the EU’s leaders did little to develop democratic and political capacity to cope with challenges.

And since 2009-10 they have damaged the fabric of European unity by insisting that “unity” means uniform neo-liberal policies across the eurozone, with crushing effects in the EU’s poorer countries.

Now wars and repression in the Middle East and Africa are pushing millions of people to seek refuge in Europe. The EU has to deal with Russia’s imperialist ambitions in Ukraine.

And the Tories’ referendum on EU membership could damage the fabric further. Cameron is running the referendum as a gamble, to woo back Tory voters who might switch to UKIP and see off the UKIP-minded wing of the Tory party.

The EU leaders’ mean-spirited response to the refugee influx is creating new barriers within Europe.

Let them all in!

Europe’s refugee “crisis” could be solved easily. Let them all in! Wealthy Europe could easily welcome several million refugees and integrate them into its 500-million-plus population.

All those who need to come to the EU should be provided with a safe passage out of the Middle East and African war zones, and an adequate living in Europe.

Instead, European governments are increasingly resorting to reintroducing border controls between EU states, attacking migrants at flashpoints such as Calais, and trying to seal the EU’s external borders.

The EU leaders’ miserable response to the refugee crisis is a danger to Europe and to the limited easing of borders and barriers achieved over the last century. The refugees are not.

The USA’s population, not counting Native Americans, was about 15 million in 1836. Over 30 million people, twice as many as that previous population, moved to the USA between 1836 and 1914. In 1907, 1.3 million migrants arrived, to add to a population then about 80 million.

That migration, relatively free until World War One, made the USA dynamic, prosperous, and culturally enriched.

In the years after 1944, about 12 million refugees, people of German descent expelled from central and Eastern Europe, arrived in West Germany, which then had a population of 40-odd million. Settling them was difficult because the country was war-shattered and the Allies were removing industrial equipment as war reparations.

But the result of that migration was the German “economic miracle” of the 1950s and 60s.

Europe can and should welcome many millions of refugees.

Among Europe’s major governments, the worst, the most mean-spirited and narrow-minded, has been Britain’s. Up to September 2015, Britain had granted asylum to fewer than 600 refugees.

Let them all in! Now!

We do not want barriers between countries in Europe to be raised high again. In the referendum we will campaign for the UK to stay in and for unity with workers across Europe to win democracy, reduced barriers between countries, and social “levelling-up” across Europe.

Some socialists, including the SWP SP and Morning Star, pretend that success for nationalists in the coming EU referendum — what is what Brexit will represent — can benefit workers or boost the prospects for socialism. That is nonsense.

Even under capitalism, voluntary European unity is better than high barriers between countries. It is progress compared to centuries of elite feuding, wars, and nationalism.

At the social and economic level, Europe is the rational arena in which to develop the economies of the European countries, and begin to level up conditions for working-class people across Europe and further afield; to organise industrial and agricultural production to benefit the whole human race, as well as to protect the environment on which we all depend.

The EU’s lower borders make it easier for people to travel or to move countries in search of a better job and a better life. Literally, they allow Europe’s 500-plus million people to find new ways to speak to each other.

The undemocratic arrogance and neo-liberal short-sightedness of the EU’s capitalist leaders threatens all those gains.

Our alternative: workers’ solidarity: discussion, joint trade union action, common political initiatives across the EU to make its institutions more democratic and to create Europe-wide alternatives to the ruling-class elite.

• Workers’ Europe campaign: www.facebook.com/ForAWorkersEurope

Defend the Heathrow 13!

Thirteen climate activists from the campaigning organisation Plane Stupid, who shut down a runway at Heathrow Airport in July 2015, have been found guilty of aggravated trespass.

They have been told that it is “almost inevitable” that they will be given prison sentences. The Heathrow 13 will be sentenced on 24 February.

In her statement, the judge stated that the thirteen were all people of integrity, who had been acting out of genuine, moral convictions, but she justified her ruling on the basis that they had cost Heathrow an “astronomical” amount as a result of 25 cancelled flights and heightened security since the action.

NECESSARY

The thirteen argued that the pressing threat of climate change and air pollution had made their actions necessary.

A statement they released following their conviction read: “the legal system does not yet recognise that climate defence is not an offence.

“When the democratic and legislative processes have failed, it takes the actions of ordinary people to change them”.

The protesters face three months in prison under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. The law was brought in during a period when the media were whipping up public outrage at illegal raves. Over recent years the charge of aggravated trespass has been increasingly used to arrest and convict protesters.

This is said to be the first time that protesters convicted of aggravated trespass will have been given prison sentences.

This ruling represents new precedent in the criminalisation of protest and confirmation of the fact that our criminal justice system serves to protect the profits of big business, over ordinary people in the overwhelming majority.

The labour movement must mobilise to defend the Heathrow 13!”
Capitalism has created life-enhancing possibilities. It has even realised some of them.

My older daughter has epilepsy. In pre-capitalist times, if she’d had medication at all, it would have had no, or harmful, effects, and the seizures would probably have become more severe until they disabled and killed her.

Today, she has been able to end the seizures with just a few pills, without side-effects. Not only in Britain, but in many poorer countries too, almost everyone learns to read and write, almost everyone has easy access to music and visual arts, a sizeable proportion can study at university.

Most jobs are cleaner, quieter, and require less physical strength than they or their equivalents used to. Food, clothing, and housing sufficient for all can be produced by maybe 20% of the total labour-time of society, while previous societies required almost all society’s labour-time to produce a scantier existence.

At the same time that capitalism, by advancing technology, creates those possibilities, it also stunts and warps them. It diminishes and threatens human life. And in some respects the stunting, warping, diminishing, threatening increases.

ENVIRONMENT
Capitalism threatens human life through global warming. Capitalism has given rise to technologies which, with judicious development and use, could reduce carbon emissions and save the environment.

Yet in recent years most energy investment has gone not into improving and cheapening renewables or nuclear power, but into “extreme”, high-carbon-emission, extraction of oil and gas: oil sands, shale oil, hydraulic fracturing. That offers the best profits in the short term. And capitalism puts profit before life.

Other industrial emissions into the atmosphere threaten life. In the UK, 60,000 people die early each year because of such pollutants as nitrogen dioxide; world-wide, 3.3 million. London went above its safe limit for that air pollution over the whole of 2016 as early as 8 January this year.

Corporations like Volkswagen, in pursuit of profit, have the technology to limit the emissions, but also have also used technology so that vehicles observe the limits only in test conditions and spew out 70 times as much pollution in actual use.

Emissions into the atmosphere threaten everyone, rich as well as poor. But capitalism also works to diminish and shorten the lives of the worse-off and favour the lives of the rich.

In Britain, people in well-off areas can expect to live much longer than people in poor areas. And they can expect to live in good general health, free of permanent limiting ailments, 20 years longer.

In the poorest areas, on average you live to 52 without permanent limiting ailments. 52! Remember, the government wants to raise the state pension age to 70.

In well-off areas, on average you live to 71 without permanent limiting ailments.

Defenders of capitalism say that its inequalities are necessary to make it dynamic — by way of the striving generated by the competitive “rat race” — and benefit even the poorest, because we get pulled up along with, although behind, the rich.

Yet, once economic life has reached the level that basic necessities can be produced by a small proportion of the available labour-time, and so almost no-one starves or freezes to death through sheer shortage, the evidence is that inequality, or relative poverty, is the major stunting factor.

Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, in their book The Spirit Level, show that among the more prosperous capitalist countries, a composite index of health and social problems shows much worse levels in the most unequal countries (USA, Portugal, UK) and better levels in the less unequal (Scandinavia, Japan).

The correlation with the country’s inequality of incomes is high. The correlation with the country’s absolute level of average income is low or zero.

The same pattern — high correlation with inequality, little or no correlation with absolute income level (within the relevant range) — is shown by comparisons between states in the USA.

Children's well-being is better in less unequal countries, worse in more unequal countries, largely uncorrelated with absolute income level.

People’s levels of confidence that they can trust neighbours and workmates are higher in less unequal countries, lower in more unequal, but by no means necessarily higher in countries with higher average incomes.

Rates of mental illness are much higher in more unequal countries; so are murder rates, and rates of imprisonment.

In the abstract, a highly unequal society could still give better chances for an individual from a worse-off family background to rise high, and a less unequal society could rate low for that “social mobility”. In fact, the more unequal countries also have less social mobility.

Exactly why being much worse-off than the other side of the tracks is more blighting than low income as such (above a certain minimum level), we don’t know. The fact is a fact. It is also a fact, documented in detail by Thomas Piketty in his book Capital in the 21st Century, that inequality, and the dominance of incomes from property, has been and is rising steadily across the most developed capitalist countries.

Despite crashes like 2008, on the whole capitalism tends to increase production. On the whole people get more smartphones, iPads, PCs, etc. than they used to. But simultaneously capitalism increases inequality and...
its blight on life. Some of the elements of inequality’s blight we know. Being overstressed; frustrated; isolated; “alienated” in the sense that your creative abilities are appropriated, manipulated, and abused by others for alien purposes, diminishes your resilience, and eventually your physical health.

Not all stress is unhealthy. Complete languor is not the ideal. Hard work is not necessarily unhealthy. Marx, while strenuously avoiding detailed blueprints of the future co-operative commonwealth, described the expansion of free time, as against enforced drudgery, as its cardinal feature. Yet by “free time” he didn’t just mean idling. “Really free activity, e.g. composing music, is at the same time precisely the most damned seriousness, the most intense exertion”.

While the demands on physical strength of many jobs have been eased, they have been made more harmfully stressful by the way they are organised. Sometimes this involves long and arbitrarily-imposed hours. Generally, as Michael Marmot, a researcher in this field, notes: “Stress at work is not simply a matter of having too much to do, but also results from too little control over the work, and from insufficient reward for the effort expended”. (“Insufficient reward” means not just low wages, but lack of satisfaction in having done something useful, lack of appreciation from others).

“The way work is organised is crucial. The way to address the problem of stress at work is to look hard at the organisation of the workplace”. Capitalists look hard at the organisation of the workplace — but with the priority of extracting more control and squeezing out more profits, thus increasing stress.

School teachers are rated by the Health and Safety Executive as the most overstressed trade, with a suicide rate 40% above the average. Most of that is due to arbitrary, often educationally counterproductive, impositions by school management. Those impositions are constantly increasing, and driven not by direct profit-seeking but by an imperative to imitate competitive profit-seeking norms.

There is much talk about “executive stress”. Some managers, especially middle managers, are overstressed. Usually the highest levels of stress are not at the top of the heap but at the bottom. The trades with the highest levels of suicides are teachers, cleaners, construction workers, health workers, not top managers.

In schools, students may well be more unhealthily stressed than the teachers — not because they are working hard at learning, which may be healthy, but because of petty school discipline and arbitrary and often irrational impositions from a competitive exam system.

In 2013 I spent a lot of time on a 24/7 picket line run by Brisbane dockworkers fighting sackings. New technologies have created the basis for making dock work much less life-sapping. Dock work now involves little heavy manual labour. Container terminals are quiet and clean.

Yet the dockworkers smoked much more than Australia’s average (low by world standards). A doctor told me why: shift workers, especially shift workers with shifts that change constantly, smoke more than others. Although nurses know the dangers of smoking better than others, they smoke more because of the shifts they work.

Those dockworkers are unhealthily stressed, despite the technical advances, because of the capitalist way the work is organised, with round-the-clock and unpredictable shifts, and arbitrary sackings.

OVERWORK

In one of the most technically-advanced capitalist economies, Japan, since the 1970s “karoshi”, death through overwork, has become an officially recognised condition.

Each year, hundreds of families, on an increasing trend, win compensation because a family member is officially certified to have died from overwork. Yet the compensation is from the government, not the employer!

Since the late 1980s, “karōjisatsu”, suicide from overwork, has also been officially recognised, with similar compensation. Overwork, in this context, means not just long hours, but “frustration”, “psychological burdens”, “lack of job control”, etc.

The difference in other capitalist countries is only that “karoshi” and “karōjisatsu” are not officially recognised.

A poignant finding from research in 2002 shows that people who become convinced that they will end up lonely suffer damage to their complex-reaching abilities. Their simple information-processing capacities are not damaged. Expectation of future physical injuries does not damage their complex-reasoning abilities. But the conviction that they will end up lonely does.

And for many it is a well-grounded conviction. In Britain, 11% of all elderly people say that they talk with a neighbour, a friend, or a relative — someone they are connected with in a human way, rather than through market transactions or official procedures — less than once a month. Once a month! Millions of less extreme cases are achingly lonely.

A poignant book, Engels wrote about how capitalism had atomised people in a way unknown to all previous societies. In the big capitalist cities, people “crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another... with brutal indifference... unfearing isolation of each in his private interest... This isolation of the individual, this narrow self-seeking, is the fundamental principle of our society everywhere... and it is nowhere so shamelessly barefaced, so self-conscious as just here in the crowding of the great city”.

Capitalism has generated the possibilities of privacy, of “a room of one’s own”, of having “time to oneself”, of choosing a path in life radically different from one’s parents and neighbours. Those possibilities are progress compared to the conformity and narrow horizons imposed by many pre-capitalist communities.

But capitalism also perverts those possibilities into enforced isolation and loneliness, and not only for the elderly. At the same time, the atomised nuclear-family households of modern capitalism create an imposed “togetherness” for young children, frequently over-supervised by their parents.

Capitalism is creating grand possibilities, but simultaneously stifling, blighting, and threatening human life. The choice for each one of us is passively to accept the stifling and blighting, and try to create a niche of relative contentment within it; or actively to take part in the collective struggle for collective democratic control over our economic life.
Orthodox Trotskyism reshaped Trotsky's ideas

By Ed Maltby

Paul Le Blanc's review of The Two Trotskyisms Confront Stalinism: Fate of the Russian Revolution volume 2 (Solidarity 388) is a thoughtful and detailed piece.

Le Blanc defends The Two Trotskyisms against some on the left who deride the book as pointless obsessing over long-ago spats. He is right to do it: such complaints remind one of Homer Simpson, who, warned that he's late for English class, sneers "Pflu English, who needs that? I'm never going to Eng-

The truth is that the two Fate of the Russian Revolution books are about the Trotskyist movement as it is right now. They are not just scholarly works about distant, long-ago argu-

ments — they trace the development of patterns of thought and behaviour that shape how our movement thinks and works today. In short, as they look at the development of what Workers' Liberty has called "apparatus Marxism".

Le Blanc focuses his review on the 1940s dispute over the class character of the USSR, and weighing the merits of "Third Camp", views that see the USSR as a new form of class society, be it capitalist or something else, against the "Orthodox" view of the USSR as still a "workers' state", albeit degenerated.

Le Blanc's deals with the subject matter in a tone of ecumenical and scholarly tact. But there can be no mistake that he means to defend Cannon against Shachtman, and en-

lists "state-capitalist" theorist Tony Cliff to help him out. For Le Blanc, Cannon's ap-

proach — which is to say, Trotsky's approach — "continues to have much to recommend it". And whereas the survival of the Cannon group vindicates Cannon's ideas, the dis-

integration of the Shachtman group (and Shacht-

man's personal rightw-wing in later life) of the weakness of the "Third Camp" tradition.

The first thing to reply to Le Blanc, and this is a key theme of the book, is this: Cannon's 1940s approach on the USSR was a miscalculation. Le Blanc himself points out the dif-

ference between would-be Marxist revo-

utions — a different form of reasoning to the theoretical impossibility”, as was the re-es-

tablishment of parliamentary democracies. This was a different form of reason compared to what had come before, and a worse one.

Le Blanc gives us an example of this kind of "orthodox" reasoning when he quotes Cliff against Shachtman: "If the Stalinist regime denotes the decline of civilization, the reactionary negation of capitalism, then it is our task to lead a new revolutionary advance. Capitalism has to be defended from Stalinist barbarism". Le Blanc summarises Cliff's view: "Partisans of the state-capitalist theory, no less than those of the degenerated workers'-state perspective, have seen bureaucratic-col-

lectivism as facilitating a fatal accommoda-

tion between would-be Marxist revolu-

tionsary and actually-existing capitalism."

There are, I think, three problems with this line of attack against Shachtman. The first is that Cliff is effectively saying that a line of en-

quiry should be rejected if it threatens to pro-

duce conclusions that clash with one of existing prejudices. Saying "X can't be true: it's heretical" is a good way of defending or-

thodoxy — but it is a poor way of figuring out the truth.

Le Blanc continues: as Le Blanc in fact acknowledges, it does not follow that if you think that the USSR is an expiable class society, more re-

actionary than capitalism, you must become a "state-capitalist". On the other hand, Cliff in the 1940s saw the USSR's "state capitalism" as a higher form of capital-

ism, and more historically progressive than what existed in the western world. Cliff was accommo-

dating to the prevailing orthodoxy (a stance which the tendency he founded has since re-

turned to, if never officially revised). But does this mean that Cliff saw himself as on the side of the USSR as the "more progressive" camp?

The third problem is, weren't the Stalinist revolutionaries in fact more reactionary than capital-

ism? Were they not "worse" from a working-

class point of view? Without exception, Stalinist societies liquidated the workers' movement, reducing it to semi-slavery and destroying its basic organisations, which are the prerequisites for socialist culture and workers' power.

What about the indisputable fact that whereas the Cannon group survived until the 1980s (when it formally repudiated Trotskyism as it understood it), the Shachtman group fell apart? I think the short answer to that is a doctrine which helps an organisation achieve success is not necessarily the same thing as a doctrine which is founded in truth or reason.

The 1950s were a period of McCarthyite re-

action and small-c conservatism in the US labour movement. They were also a period of massive Stalinist expansion. The immense success of the USSR drew many of the world's rebels, from national liberation movements to leftwing intellectuals, into the Soviet sphere. Sometimes these new satellites were more or less reluctant, like Jean-Paul Sartre. But what-

ever that was, the result was the same: the major antagonist of western capitalist im-

perialism in the postwar period was the So-

viet Union. Unwillingly, with many misgivings and a more honourable record than most, the Soviet tendency was drawn into this orbit. And as Trotsky himself said, "The geographical location of a political movement is a matter of principle."

In November 1945, Cannon would declare that only "careless thinkers" could believe that the Second World War had ended, and he and his allies would defend that statement when challenged, rather than admitting it was an extravagance. Reconstruction of Eu-

rope using American money was declared "a
might make of it (and Cannon’s criticisms were trenchant and heartfelt), then that would have provided you with a morale-bolstering illusion. However bad things were at home: interna
tional, the “conquests of October” were on the march!

Moreover, SWP-USA had an internal regime which was that of a sect. But it also had the positive features of a sect — it inspired sacrifice and devotion which kept the group together. Eventually, the internal regime would, by Cannon’s own account, “shatter the party”, whereby the leadership leadership emerged around Jack Barnes. Cannon denounced the “strangling” in ad
dvance, but he had provided Barnes with the tools he needed.

The Shachtman current did not have such sheltering illusions, and, for both good and ill, they lacked the sectish character of the Cannon group. Their view of Stalinist rule as an expansion of anti-working-class slavery was accurate, but also profoundly demoral
ing. That it also had a blight on the Trotskyist movement.

The dogma of “degenerated” and “de
degraded” workers’ states seems today to be as

The STP [USA, no relation to the SWP-UK] had the
idea that China was some kind of workers’ state and that Taiwan was just an agency of

The book presents the material in such a way as to show the whole dialogue between the two sides — crudely, between Shacht

The book is beautiful because it shows you

The SWP had another thing going for

The whole American left was under 

If it’s just a matter of nationalised industry, then, well, capitalist states were nationalising

The introduction traces the debates over the nature of the Soviet Union from the 1930s to the 1950s, culminating in the rejection of

For Hands Off Cuba” after the 1959 revolution. We said “Hands Off Cuba”, too, but because we supported the Castro

This is really a book about now

This book gives us material to think about

imperialism, as if imperialism was only on

democracy, often without clearly repudiating its revolutionary viability.

Shachtman’s “fall” — his decision in 1962 to

towards the war to win the war. He made a

Cannon’s approach has much to recommend it: I find it hard to agree. But the issues here are not old, obscure stuff!!

I am particularly impressed by the intro

The SWP were able to re-float through the

No liberty without socialism, no social

Why did the Soviet Union collapse? I don’t think it’s that the theory of bureau
cratic collectivism was wrong, on its own terms, for the bureaucrats, the system of total suppression and control of all commu

The STP had something else going for

Ed Strauss reviews The Two Trotskyisms Confront Stalinism

The book is an amazing textbook. As a young student in the 1950s, I was reading some of the documents which are in the

collection, I was coming in at the tail-end of some of these debates; but we had

The dogma of “degenerated” and “de

Adaptations of it remain — the Cliff
tise groups around the world, for example, having the same relationship to both the

the Trotsky movement. Le Blanc says that Cannon’s approach has much to recommend it: I find it hard to agree. The
dogma of “degenerated” and “deformed” workers’ states seems to provide too much of a freakish historical aberration as the
social systems to which it was an ideological substitute, conceived in error and maintained for reasons of sect prestige.

The book is beautiful because it shows you the evolution of the growing debates and di

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The book is a beautiful book that populists or reformists use, or even sometimes fascists, to mean just

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Stalinism as, at some level, the carrier of the

As Hal Draper had it, what’s at stake in

They were mistaken, perhaps understand

1959 revolution. We said “Hands Off Cuba”

we had the idea that China was some kind of workers’ state and that Taiwan was just an agency of imperialism. They saw China as an anti-imperialist force, as if imperialism was only on one side, as if there are not in fact several im

The whole American left was under tremendous pressure in the 1950s. We’d had McCarthyism, and there was fear about. The

The book presents the material in such a way as to show the whole dialogue between the two sides — crudely, between Shacht

The book is an amazing textbook. As a young student in the 1950s, I was reading some of the documents which are in the
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This is really a book about now

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Labor activists support junior doctors

By Ralph Peters

The left-wing group Red Labour, which specialises in use of social media, Facebook and Twitter, has been sabotaged in an astonishingly undemocratic way.

Red Labour began in 2011 as a modest Facebook page. Over the following years it demonstrated the way that social media might be used to get out news to those on the left of the Labour Party. They used videos, memes and factual information to counter right-wing arguments.

The Red Labour national Facebook page gathered 31,000 supporters and a similar number followed their Twitter account. Alongside it were many local pages, forwarding and adding to these national messages.

When Red Labour was started, the left in the Party was disorganised and weak. The success it had in building an online following provided significant proof that the public were still responsive to a broad anti-austerity agenda. Many senior figures in the Party acknowledged Red Labour’s contribution to Jeremy Corbyn’s success in the leadership election.

But on 19 January, in an act of outrageous vandalism, the Red Labour Facebook page was hijacked, temporarily closed down, and taken over. The Twitter account was similarly taken over. It is not known at the time of this paper going to press who was responsible for this vandalism. The saboteurs have chosen to keep their identities secret.

It is possible that the person or persons responsible may have had some minor role in the beginning of Red Labour, but contributed little in recent times or during the Party leadership election. Whoever they are, they never voiced any alternative proposals about how it should be run within the organisers’ group that decided Red Labour’s policies and output.

In effect someone has overruled without discussion the overwhelming majority of Red Labour organisers, stolen the Red Labour page, and sabotaged the hard work of many comrades over several years.

The policy of the hijackers became clear when they reopened the now fraudulent Red Labour page a few days later, exclusively in their control. In their first statement they accuse Red Labour of a list of charges, including having become a rump controlled by Workers’ Liberty.

Out of the nearly one hundred Red Labour organisers, only two or three were connected with Workers’ Liberty. None of the “admins” of Red Labour had more relationship with Workers’ Liberty than any other left winger activist or Corbyn supporter in the Party.

However, Red Labour had taken a leading role in campaigning against the witch-hunting of campaigning bodies of socialists like Workers’ Liberty.

The nonsense about Red Labour being controlled by Workers’ Liberty has been combined with the folly of false attempts to “fire” Workers’ Liberty members to people on the right who have been trying to get organised. Needless to say these tweets have been readily reweeted by a host of right-wingers. This hijacking has done some temporary damage to one of the left wing’s most effective social media facilities. But the hijacker(s), if they ever do reveal themselves, are going nowhere.

As the true facts become known and after the initial confusion, they will be widely shunned by the left in the Party.

• Red Labour have re-established new social media accounts and all socialists who use social media should make sure to switch over from following the former ones to the new ones: facebook.com/RedLabour2016 and twitter.com/RedLabour2016

Student Nurses national week of action

8-14 February

Student nurses across the country will be holding a national week of action to protest at the removal of NHS bursaries for healthcare students and in support of junior doctors. The week will include a one hour walk-out on Wednesday 10 February.

bit.ly/NHSwalkout
Rail: fight pensions sell-out!

By Gareth Davenport

Workers at the UK’s train operating companies are facing a huge attack on their pensions due to government legislation that ends the contracting-out of the Second State Pension.

The legislation means higher National Insurance contributions for both employees (1.4%) and employers (3.4%). The government has also passed legislation to help employers out with this — by allowing them to carry out annual raids on occupational pensions schemes, without even having to consult with scheme trustees.

You might think rail unions would mount a robust defence against any attempts by industry employers to use the new legislation to attack pension rights, but it seems not. All four rail unions (Aslef, RMT, TSSA and Unite) have voluntarily entered into a deal affecting almost all members of the Railways Pensions Scheme who were employed after 4 November 1993.

This “deal” worsens pension rights in two main ways:

- The normal retirement age (the age at which you can退休 and claim your full pensions rights) has been pushed back from 60 to 62.
- Any increases in pensionable pay from April 2016 will be subject to a cap of RPI + 0.25% for benefits already earned (pensionable pay can still rise by more than that but will only count going forward from the new year).

This includes “cost of living” increases and any increases in pay brought about by stepping up in grade (i.e. from Customer Service to Train Guard or Train Guard to Driver).

So retirements have been pushed two years further away (unless workers are prepared to accept a reduction) and pensionable pay is no longer linked to final salary at the point of retirement but is based on “career average” earnings.

Unions seem to be arguing that this “protects” all staff across the industry from having the pension plundered annually by employers, whereas if the issue was dealt with on an employer-by-employer basis some employers would agree to comparatively reasonable settlements — like Eurostar, who have absorbed the 3.4% increase while staff will have to foot the bill for their 1.4% — whereas workers with some companies would lose far more than this.

It appears that the leaders of the unions have looked at the graveness of the situation and bolted on the fightback, and are so scared of the reaction of members to this “deal” that they have decided not to risk consulting them.

It is not inherently wrong to, as the phrase goes, “pick your battles” (although this is a battle we should “pick”).

It is, however, outrageous to take such a hugely important decision out of the hands of the people it affects.

Tube unions suspend strikes

By Ollie Moore

A strike planned by London Underground (LU) workers on 27 January will not go ahead, after the four unions involved suspended their action.

LU management have offered unions a deal on pay, terms, and conditions, which includes arrangements for running a 24-hour service on certain lines at weekends (“Night Tube”). The four-year deal promises a 1% pay increase in the first year, plus a £500 day week for drivers on the Jubilee line. The four-year deal promises a 1% pay increase in the first year, plus a £500 day week for drivers on the Jubilee line.

Drivers on stations will see many workers forced into extra weekend working. Accepting this deal should be out of the question, so unions urgently need to reinstate action to force management’s hand.

RMT has promised a “week of action” involving station staff from 7 February, the week when LU plans to impose the “Fit for the Future” programme on certain stations, and has further strikes planned for 15-16 and 17-18 February.

Workers’ Rights in a Global Economy

What are global workers’ rights? Which institutions and instruments can be used to realise them, including in global supply chains? Join this Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) of the Global Labour University to explore these questions. Based on a careful mix of video lectures, readings, interactive quiz questions, online resources and interviews with activists and labour scholars from around the world, participants will gain insights into the varying ways of looking at how to do.

Register: bit.ly/globalrights

Save London Met Uni

By Gemma Short

UCU members at London Metropolitan University are being balloted for strikes over cuts.

London Metropolitan university has been struck by a series of financial crises in the past five years, culminating in several waves of cuts. Last year Unison members at the university fought to stop redundancies.

100 Sheffield steel jobs to go

By Peggy Carter

Up to 100 jobs could be at risk at Sheffield steel company Forgemasters.

Forgemasters, which employs 700 workers, says it will also be consulting on changes to workers’ contracts as part of a “company turnaround” to deal with the crisis in the steel industry.

On 21 November last year hundreds of steel workers and other dancies of support staff, including their branch secretary.

As part of the current package of cuts, the University plans to close several of its city campuses, including the Cass Institute for the Arts which students occupied in protest in December.

The cuts will also result in the loss of 93 staff posts, with no guarantee of no compulsory redundancies.

Recycling workers to strike

By Harry Davies

Sheffield is one of victimisation of workers and union activists, of exploitation and allegations of corruption.

This struggle exposes a range of appalling practices and of unsafe and degrading conditions inflicted on staff who have continually stressed that their priority is to the community and to the efficient running of their workplace.

Something that, like all organised workers, they know best how to do.
By Miles Kerin

On Tuesday 12 January, a Labour amendment to the Housing Bill, which would have ensured that all rented accommodation was suitable for living in, was defeated in the House of Commons by 312 votes to 219.

Local Government Minister, Marcus Jones, said the amendment would cause “unnecessary regulation and cost to landlords”. Tories don’t think landlords should be obliged to repair mouldy, damaged, unsafe or otherwise unsuitable housing. This was just the latest example of Tory promotion of cut-throat landlordism.

But 39% of Conservative MPs are landlords themselves! That includes David Cameron, who has made half a million in the last five years from renting. A total of 196 MPs rent out one property or more. Councillors are often in on the act too. It is not unknown for property developers to offer fancy lunches and expenses in exchange for Town Hall co-operation.

Other amendments to the Bill include setting a limit of five years occupancy for new council tenants, and allowing property developers to process building schemes through a private company rather than the local council. All in keeping with other provisions in the Bill: for example, a couple earning £30,000 together (i.e. both on just above minimum wage) will have their council rents increased to market rates, and councils will be forced to sell “high value” council properties.

Many amendments to the Bill were voted on in the House of Commons on 5 January at 2am, when most MPs were in bed. And, as Shadow housing minister John Healey pointed out, an extra 50 pages of amendments were added at the last minute, making an already complicated bill more so. Architects for Social Housing estimate over 50,000 families, upwards of 150,000 people, have been forcibly evicted from inner-London boroughs in the last three years. Some have moved to outer boroughs, but most out of the city altogether. Social tenants face a worrying time. (Whilst London is boasting with luxury apartments for the super-rich, over 50% of UK social housing is in London).

In addition to the Housing Bill, the recent Adonis Report has suggested 3,500 housing estates in London — housing over a million people — be reclassified as brownfield sites, to facilitate their “redevelopment”.

Huge cuts in local government finances also mean many cash-strapped councils are willing to take on land deals with property developers where a council-owned housing estate is knocked down, with a promise that whilst expensive flats will be built, there will be “some” affordable accommodation built for renting or for first time buyers. But the percentage of “affordable” and “rented” is haggled down by the developer.

In any case, “affordable” accommodation at 80% of market rates is still unaffordable for most who want to rent, and those looking to buy cannot afford the deposit.

In addition affordable accommodation is often built outside of new developments so that new apartment owners don’t bump into any of the proles who used to live there.

For example, Grosvenor’s new housing development, Neo Bankside, will consist of over 200 apartments being sold from £1.25 million to £20 million each. The developers paid Southwark Council £11 million, but only agreed to build the required quota of affordable housing off the developed site. The only place Southwark Council could afford to develop was on other council-owned land, and so it demolished a children’s home and a day nursery to build the affordable housing. Other estates under imminent threat include the Lower Falinge estate in Rochdale, and Broadwater Farm in Tottenham.

Cameron has now promised a paltry £140 million scheme to build new affordable houses for time buyers, with affordable defined as £450,000 — well out of the reach for most would-be first-time buyers, let alone current renters. In 2014, a person looking to buy a house, earning the national average wage of £26,500 a year, would find 99% of properties in England and Wales beyond their means. Someone on the minimum wage of £14,000 a year would find 99% of properties in England and Wales beyond their means (bit.ly/1E8geHH).

We don’t need more so-called “affordable” properties. We need more council housing! We need a nationalised banking system, which controls interest rates on mortgages unrelated to stock market speculation. We should use the wealth of the banks, and increased taxation of the rich, to fund a massive building program of council houses with fair rents and secure tenancies. Homelessness should not be a lottery for the diminishing council stock, but the target of intense government redress. Private landlords who refuse to make their houses suitable for living, including prompt repairs when needed, should be banned from letting. All private landlords should subject to rent caps. Councils should be granted powers to seize empty properties which are being used as investment.

These are policies we need to fight for, in our union branches and Labour Parties, on housing demonstrations, and in community campaigns. The future of social housing is at stake.