



WEALTH PRESS
THE WORK & TIME ISSUE

ISSUE 5, DECEMBER 2016

EDITORIAL

WHO WE ARE

The Wealth Press is a collaborative attempt to view the world through the lens of inequality and to see what we find. It has been created and edited by an open group of individuals with a concern for inequality and a need to voice those concerns.

WHAT WE DO

We put those at the margins on the centre page. We discover and share the voices muted by society. We work horizontally and respectfully towards one another at all times.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

We believe ideas should be shared, not owned. We believe in equalising voices. In empowering people to tell their own stories, we redefine the parameters of journalism. We believe in investigation, in curiosity, and in questioning the status quo. Get involved!

GET INVOLVED!

Anyone can get involved with the Wealth Press; whether that is as a writer, a designer, a web editor, a photographer, a sub-editor or simply as someone with an idea or a story that they want to be told. We meet every second Wednesday, from the 21st of September onwards. We meet at the London Action Resource Centre (LARC) located at 62 Fieldgate St, London E1 1ES.

Our next issue will be on work and time — feeding into Wealth Equality's broader campaign to demand a Four Day Week. If you are interested, or

know anyone who may be interested in contributing do not hesitate to come along to our first organising meeting.

For more information email Aidan at aidanmmharper@gmail.com

WITH WEALTH EQUALITY...

Come join us at our mother organization: Wealth Equality. We gives voices to those silenced by our current economic and political system. Not tied by national, cultural or linguistic boundaries, creating a model towards a better future for humanity, recognising the needs of every adult and child and enabling all to fulfil their true potential and feel valued within the world.

We aim to not only reimagine a world based on the equal distribution of wealth but to create practical steps towards making that ideal a reality. We do this through a wide variety of projects, campaigns and events based around the wants and needs of our local community.

Find us on www.wealthequality.org

Facebook: [Wealth Equality](#)
[The Wealth Press](#)

Twitter: [@Wealth_Equality](#)

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This issue of the Wealth Press is linked to a wider, ongoing campaign on demanding a 4 Day Week run by Wealth Equality.

The submissions within must therefore be seen in the context of this campaign. The campaign aims to do three things:

MAKE OUR TIME POLITICAL

“To realize the unimportance of time is the gate to wisdom” – Bertrand Russell, Books, films, television, music, poetry and all forms of popular culture constantly hammer home the importance of time, and how it should not be wasted. And yet, it seems that the higher the value we give to our free time, the less political it becomes. Surely, something as important as our own time should have a suitable level of political importance.

MAKE OUR WORK POLITICAL

Historically, time was at the centre of the Labour movement. The trade union movement helped establish both the 8 hour day and the 5 day week. For some reason though, we have forgotten that the time we spend at work is one which is inherently contested. The time we spend at work is ultimately one of power: we work long hours because power is unevenly shared in society. That power balance should be contested.

PROVIDE A NEW VISION OF THE FUTURE

The Left has for too long not been able to provide a vision of the future which we can rally behind. That is a failing of massive proportions. For too long it has been reactive and on the defensive – it has become a form of anti-politics (anti-austerity, anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, anti-racist etc.). That is not to undermine the incredible work done by a number of incredible people – but it does not offer a vision of what we can strive towards. It is time for the Left to become bold and assertive in what it thinks the world should be. And for that to happen it needs powerful ideas which are transformative. The 4 Day Week is a campaign which is potent because it is both achievable and transformative.

JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN TO DEMAND A 4 DAY WEEK

NEXT MEETING: 5 January 2017
Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/shorterworkingweek/?fref=ts>
Twitter: [@Shorter_Week](#) (https://twitter.com/Shorter_Week)

SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

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Links for further
Information www.wealthequality.org

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Simone Bolla

ALTERNATIVE WORK WEEKS: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

THE ORIGIN OF THE FIVE DAY WORKING WEEK

In 1908, a mill in New England introduced a 5 day work week to allow its Jewish workers to celebrate the Sabbath on Saturday, making the 2 days off per week a permanent solution (Sunday had been a holiday for a while). In the US, a 5 day week began in for very different reasons: high unemployment levels during the Great Depression made it more convenient to reduce workers' hours than laying them off.

THE FOUR DAY WEEK IN THE US

Not surprisingly, the idea of a shorter working week was revived in the US during the recession of the early 1970s. The 4 Day Week was meant to compress the traditional 5 x 8 hour shifts into a 4 x 10 hour shifts. Studies at the time suggested that this would increase productivity and enable workers to save on fuel, due to fewer days of commuting.

At its peak in 1975, 1 million employees were on a 4 Day Week, but the scheme was gradually abandoned afterwards and lost its attractiveness in the business, media and academic world. Surveys showed that the majority of workers involved were happy with it, yet little evidence was found on productivity gains. It was mostly a private small business initiative and the Unions held no strong view on the matter as it was difficult to find a universal 4 Day Week model for all full-time workers, and there was fear that it could have negatively affect overtime payments in the long term. The American story of the 4 Day Week ends during the Great Recession. When the Governor of Utah put 72% of its civil servants on a 4 Day Week pilot programme in 2008, in an at-

tempt to reduce costs and improve efficiency in the delivering of public services. Although good results were achieved in terms of both office productivity and [savings on the energy bills](#), the program was abandoned in 2011.

THE SIX HOUR WORK DAY IN SWEDEN

Sweden began experimenting with different models of working time in 1989. In the city of Kiruna, 250 municipal employees were put on a 6 hour workday scheme for 16 years, without reducing salaries. The project came to an end in 2005, as the council found [poor evidence of any substantial improvement](#) that could justify the costs undertaken to keep running the scheme itself.

[In 2003 Toyota introduced the 6 Hour Work Day](#) in its factory in Gothenburg, and has made the change a permanent one. The results were excellent in terms of increased productivity, profit, employee satisfaction and low turnover. The salaries were left unchanged, and every hour worked beyond the sixth one was considered extra time, paid accordingly.

Following the example of the Japanese car-maker, in 2015 the 6-hour workday was introduced into the Svartedalens elderly care home, and in the Sahlgrenska University Hospital in Gothenburg. The Svartedalens care home revealed a [20% increase in productivity](#), which translated in more activities taking place at the care home, and healthier and happier staff. Yet [the economic benefits only partially offset the \\$735,000 spent to hire the extra nurses](#) needed to make the new working scheme feasible.

The results in the [Sahlgrenska University Hospital](#), one of the biggest in Europe, confirmed a similar rise in productivity (seen as the number of operations performed) and a drop in sick leaves and absenteeism, but at a high cost for the Hospital. [Waiting times for patients were cut from months to weeks](#), allowing people to go back to work more quickly, thus shortening the length of sick leaves in other workplaces.

THE 35 HOUR WEEK IN FRANCE

In 2000, France passed a law, called the loi Aubry, which reduced the working week from 40 to 35 hours. The aim was to decrease the unemployment rate, pushing firms to hire more staff to make up for the weekly loss of 5 working hours per employee, but the effects of the law are still unclear. The [IMF](#) claims that very few jobs were created compared to the ones hoped by the government. Conversely, eminent French research institutes argue that the law has created [350 000 jobs](#), and that [productivity in France increased](#) compared to other big European countries like Germany and the UK.

Overall, the 4 Day Week experiments have not produced clear results. More research on the topic would be welcomed. This is especially pressing because of issues around climate change, and the potential for a 4 Day Week to reduce carbon emissions.



Sam Hind

DRIVING THE FUTURE



London Taxi, Photo by Melina Dieckgräber

On Friday 28th October, Uber lost an employment tribunal. It was a landmark case. Drivers previously defined by the tech giant as 'self-employed' will now get full employment rights. The decision has repercussions across the 'gig economy'. For example, Deliveroo couriers are now expected to fight for similar rights such as holiday pay and pensions.

It is called the gig economy because it is sustained by precarious labour. Workers in the gig economy are expected to be 'on-call' and do not receive an hourly minimum wage. Instead they are paid per job. Supporters argue that this increases 'flexibility' for those workers, however it is also a handy euphemism for precarity. With Uber drivers classed as self-employed, Uber bears no responsibility for their wellbeing. After the ruling defining Uber drivers as workers, Uber now shoulders that responsibility. This is the least they could do, considering that in 2015 the company had [projected global net revenues of \\$1.5bn](#).

But battles over workers' rights might soon be pointless. In January 2015, Uber effectively [bought out](#) Carnegie Mellon University's Robotics Department. On Wednesday 14th September, they [began trialing](#) driverless Ubers on the streets of Pittsburgh. Whilst this was



regarded as a 'research exercise', rather than an imminent rollout, the effect this will have is clear.

Thus, the ruling is perhaps a hollow victory. Uber's global revenues will be hit by their new need to give basic employment rights to their drivers. But it won't destroy their ultimate goal: to automate the private hire industry. In doing so, they eradicate all need to provide their 'new' employees with any rights, because these new employees will not be employed any more. Instead, their jobs will be given to robotic vehicles.

Automation promises a lot. When considered in a left-wing vision, such as that offered by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams in *Inventing the Future* (Verso, 2015), it liberates us from wage labour. In right-wing visions, it boosts growth margins. In Uber's version it does both. As a result, calls for a shorter working week begin to look increasingly outdated. Workers – as well as the working week – are eliminated.

The statistics show this automation would have huge effects. [According to Uber](#), 71% of drivers have 'dependents' (children, parents etc.) living at home, with 85% working for the

platform in order 'to have more flexibility'. By Uber's own calculations, automation would hit drivers and their families hard. Yet, [as the GMB Union said](#) in April of this year, net pay for drivers in places such as London is £5.68 an hour. Working 68 hours a week they would be expected to take home just £20,000. No amount of job flexibility will resolve the fact that working for Uber just doesn't pay.

Historically, in both the UK and US, the taxi industry has been dependent on migrant labour. The same is the case for Uber. Its Seattle operations [are reliant](#) on the city's Ethiopian community. In LA, it [wants to recruit](#) even more Latino drivers. Back in London, Transport for London (responsible for regulating transportation in the city) want Uber drivers to pass an English [test 'to enhance public safety'](#). With so many migrant drivers, Uber knows this will radically reduce the pool of possible workers. Needless to say, automation will hit already-precarious migrant communities even harder in the future.

Automation in the current economy would mean: (a) a greater imbalance between work and life, and (b) increasing precarity for already precarious communities. With an in-

creasingly gloomy outlook, it seems unlikely that the automation of the private hire industry will bring anything other than misery, to those struggling to make a living.

Automation under Uber looks increasingly like a replaying of the 1980s. With companies finding it harder to make higher profits, they have turned to morally suspect 'fixes' in the short term. For Uber this has meant low-tax arrangements (it [funnels revenues](#) through a Dutch subsidiary company) to ensure its rapidly expanding global operations do not hit profits. It has also meant playing legal tricks, such as classifying drivers as self-employed 'partners' rather than full employees. The recent ruling reduces the effect of one of these fixes, but leaves in place the other.

Eradicating the workforce altogether seems increasingly attractive to capitalist enterprises such as Uber. Automation therefore, rather than a progressive call for a shorter working week, is a regressive move to suppress wages, eradicate workers, and increase profits. The possible automation of the private hire industry brings us back to the reality of living and working in a capitalist system. It also draws attention to future battles over the very nature of work itself.

CALL TO ACTION

Check out GMB Union's 'Taxi for Uber' campaign [here](#). Contribute to a funding drive for the IWGB Couriers Branch [here](#). The IWGB recently crowdfunded Deliveroo and UberEATS strikes in the UK, and have been integral in fighting for migrant and precarious workers' rights in the gig economy.

Gary Stevenson

Would a 4 Day Week be bad for “The Economy”?

We live in an economy of contrasts. Young people are working longer hours than ever, contributing to a nationwide epidemic of stress, bad health, anxiety and depression. An army of zero-hour contract workers wait eagerly by their phones, hoping desperately for more work which often does not come.

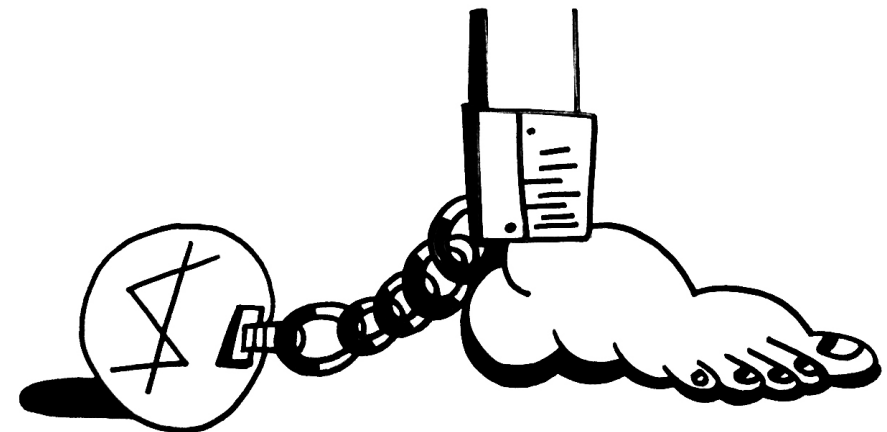
In this article, I would like to discuss these economic arguments. I would like to highlight that long working hours and low wages are not an inevitable part of a modern economy, but are rather a result of increasing inequality. I would like to describe how higher wages and shorter working hours could both be possible in a less unequal economy, and also to emphasise that the importance of higher wages should never be forgotten when we fight for the shorter working week. It is easy to see why the 4 Day Week Campaign makes sense. By limiting the time

worked by those working the longest, we can ease the pressure on the overworked. At the same time, more opportunities to find work are created for the many who need it. It seems like a win-win on the face of it. History has also shown us that reducing the working week is possible – remember that a 6-day week was once the norm.

BUT THERE WILL CLEARLY BE MANY OBJECTIONS, AND THE LOUDEST OF THESE, I SUSPECT, WILL BE FROM THE ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE.

The first argument, and a sensible one, is that a move to a 4 Day Week will surely reduce the amount of work done in our economy overall, and that this will surely damage “our economy”.

The second argument is a much more human one – there are many within our current economy who, despite working long hours over a five day week or even more, are struggling to



support themselves and their families. How can we, in good conscience, fight to reduce the working hours of these people when they urgently need every penny that they are currently able to make?

THERE ARE SENSIBLE AND IMPORTANT ARGUMENTS, AND MUST BE DISCUSSED.

Let's start with "the economy". It makes perfect sense to argue that, if people work less, less will be produced, and that this will hurt the economy overall.

The first counterargument to this is one that we have already mentioned – we currently exist in a society where work is distributed extremely unequally. Many work far longer than they want to, and would love to work less (trust me, I was one of those people). At the same time there are many people who are extremely underworked would love for the opportunity to work more. A limitation on the work hours of those working the longest would almost certainly achieve a healthy redistribution of work within our society,

away from those who don't want to it, towards those who need it. This would certainly be a good thing.

However, it must be accepted that there would almost certainly be a reduction of overall hours worked to some degree. It is easy to see this as an economic weakness. And yet, to see it as a weakness is to make a very common misunderstanding about the nature of the economy.

Many of us, including many journalists, politicians and sometimes even economists, consider the economy to be all about work and production. Of course, work and production are both extremely important, but they are not always what drives the economy forward. In fact, there are many occasions, such as the time that we are living with right now, when the supply of goods is not a global problem.

In times like now, when the wealthy are very, very wealthy, they have lots of surplus wealth that they want to invest in more production.

They use this wealth to build things like factories, roads and railways all over Asia. In times like now, when there are huge numbers of people in poverty, there are many people who are desperate for work. This creates what we could call a production glut, or a supply glut, and this creates a very strange economy. In times like this, production is very large, but spending is low - this drives wages and interest rates down. Overproduction persuades the rich not to make real investments, pushing them to invest in housing instead, which drives property prices up.

As counterintuitive as it might seem, times like these need not more work, but less work from poor people, and much, much more spending from the rich. When we understand the situation of the whole economy, we can see that less work is actually, in our current climate, an overall economic good.

But we must also consider the human perspective. We live in a country with many working poor, where full time workers have

to use food banks. How can we argue to reduce the hours of these people, desperate for work?

My honest belief, is that this will be really hard. But we must also understand the economic truth of these people's situations. Their problem has never been a lack of work, but a woefully low level of wages, combined with spiralling and unaffordable rents. On top of this, public services and welfare payments have been savagely cut, at the exact moment it is most needed.

I support a future where work hours are humane, and where people have time for the families, their friends and their communities without sacrificing economic security. More than anything, I believe that such a future is economically possible, and that a shorter working week should be a part of that future. But at this time of great and widening need we cannot take our eyes off of decent wages and affordable rents. That is what people need the most.

Jonathan Nomamiukor

The 30 Percent You May Not Get Back

I asked my friend Q how his life changed after his daughter was born 2 months ago. “I plan my day down to the minute, brother. I can’t waste it anymore – it’s too precious. She’s too precious.” Q went on to explain that each moment he spends with her is deliberate. “I read to her each morning. I heard that the difference between low-income babies and high-income babies is that babies from low-income families hear 30 million less words than richer ones. I want to give her every advantage I can to grow.”

The thought that my friend schedules his life down to the minute each day was a little surprising. He doesn’t realize it, but he is growing just as rapidly as she is. None of us are static people – the person we are today is different than who we were a year ago, and that person is different than who we will be next year. We may not be able to control time, but we can control how we spend ours.

Like many Americans, nearly half of my waking moments are spent working. The time that I spend either getting to work, leaving work, or actually working, is time that I spend away from my loved ones. Studies have found that roughly one third of human life is spent at work. Although I’m not convinced that spending thirty per cent of my life at work is the best allotment of my time, I work because I need the money.

That’s the premise of the trade-off, anyway. We work for money to pay for the things we need and maybe splurge on the things we want. Like many others, that hypothetical trade-off isn’t reality to me yet. Most of the money I earn is spent paying off the debts that I incurred in order to do the kind of work I do. I allot a hefty portion of my paycheck to paying off both my student and my car loans and then my rent. I’m not the only one - student debt has reached endemic levels now totalling \$1.2 trillion. And although I’m privileged enough to have chosen a job I enjoy, it still feels as though I’ve signed up to trade away a third of my life to pay off my lenders.

As Q told me after his daughter was born, our time in this world may be precious, but so are the people in it. He spends as much time as he can nurture her to ensure she grows as she matures. By virtue of being alive, I know that I change a little bit each day too. I just hope that I grow as well.

CALL TO ACTION

Support the Strike Debt initiative to help eliminate the financial restraints that many feel. More information is available here:

<http://strikedebt.org/>

Working Hours around the world in 2015

HOURS WORKED PER WORKER, 2015



Jemima Foxtrot

When time is deliciously empty,
 I am rolling in the sheets until this Monday covers me
 like treacle. I have a brother. He's a teacher.
 He doesn't get paid enough.
 More than forty hours clump together like mud around the single hair that is his week.
 He gets eczema when he's stressed. He always gets eczema.

"Time is money" they say as if it is only as precious as vein-patterned twenties,
 as grimy cash. Think of each minute as a grape bunch-clustered
 into an hour, tense and quivering, primed to pop.
 Money is necessary, glowing, ring-fenced for the few.
 Lack of time irritates skin.
 Lack of money calls survival instincts to our surface,
 makes mad waves.

Today I stretch out like the day after a night shift, breathe a rhapsody of nothing.
 But we all must
 pay bills. Build coins into walls like lego.
 Jut your chin above the channel, keep your legs kicking.
 Grow a family and feed it well. Keep a clean, warm house. Eat incredibly expensively.
 They say that if you're not well paid, you're failing.

Each blockish wooden week sits ugly in a crumble-down, powder-dry job.
 Scale the week like a spider, letting none of it rub off on you. Live for the weekend.
 Drink away the weekend.

I must, I must, I must make money. I must stay, I must stay involved.
 Each kid is franked with a variable red value,
 sent hurtling through the world
 to collect experience like pennies. Bleed time.



Liang Jingting (Hong Kong)
Translated by Yang Yuan (Beijing)

CHINA: A NATION OF VOLUNTARY OVERTIME



LIANG Jingting is an MPhil Graduate at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Her research focusses on migrant assembly-line workers. She was one of the editors of the news and analysis website [Groundbreaking.cn](#), which is currently being restructured.

YANG YUAN is a foreign correspondent for the Financial Times in Beijing, where she covers the Chinese economy. She is one of the co-founders of the student campaigning network, Rethinking Economics.

China's Labour [Law](#) states that workers should not work more than eight hours per day, or 44 hours per [week](#). But in today's China, working overtime is the norm: last year, around 140 million rural migrants worked more than 44 hours in the week. 35% of white-collar employees worked more than 5 hours of overtime per week, according to a survey of over [13,000 workers](#). Those in the IT and Internet sectors worked the most, staying on for an average of 9.3 hours per week.

Earlier this year, a study of Chinese start-ups and tech companies found that more than 90% of staff had to work [overtime](#). Almost two-tenths of all staff said they were working a so-called "996" schedule (working from 9am to 9pm for 6 days a week) or a "10-10-7" schedule (10am to 10pm, 7 days a week).

Regardless of whether you're a blue-collar or white-collar worker, doing overtime harms your mental and physical health: [it can kill](#). The tragic death of a 14 year old who died suddenly after working 11 hours per day makes this point all too clear. Overly long hours tire you out, and take away time from rest, leisure, self-education and self-reflection.

This overtime is said to be "voluntary". In the manufacturing sector, factories often set the basic salary of workers very low, so that if they do not work overtime, then the workers aren't able to make ends meet in the city they've migrated to. White-collar workers often find that in order to finish the work they've been assigned, eight hours are nowhere near enough. And some employees, even though they've finished their tasks, will see their colleagues still at work, and feel they should stay on late too.

Of course, there are some professions in which people seem to be gluttons for hard work. Many entrepreneurs will do overtime through seeing the value of their chosen project, pursuing their self-growth, or seeking a right to shares in the company once it's floated.

I heard an old union president of a state-owned company reminisce about working during the 1950s. He once told an electric welder who had already worked over ten hours to go home and rest. He watched the welder go out from the east gate, only to re-enter shortly from the south gate, and carry on working.

Some people resent overtime; others strive for it. The existence of widespread overtime in an economy does not by itself tell us where these attitudes come from. The drive to work hard emerges in many different forms of labour relations.

If workers could decide for themselves what to create, how to create it, and how to allocate the gains of their labour; if workers felt their labour was valuable and worthwhile; then they would more fully lose themselves through being absorbed in their work. On the contrary, if workers have no control over the course of their work, if their work is repetitive and mechanical, then overwork will be painful.

The public already aware of the severity of the problem of overwork, and popular discourse around this topic often comes in the form of giving recommendations such as to sleep well, to eat well, and to exercise well. These recommendations certainly can improve workers' health. But I believe that the problem of overwork can only be solved from the root causes once workers organise collectively and negotiate with business-owners.

Madeleine Ellis-Peterson

SOME THOUGHTS ON WORK, TIME AND COMMUNITIES



People in the UK work a lot. The UK tops the European long hours league and the number of people working over 48 hours a week in the UK has increased by 15% since 2010.

Why do we work this much? And what happens to the other non-work aspects of our lives, when so much of our time is spent working?

The average full time worker in the UK spends about 38 hours a week working. When you factor in travel time, unpaid overtime (in 2015, more than five million people put in an average of 7.7 hours extra work a week in unpaid overtime), time thinking about work outside of work and time spent telling other people about our work, it becomes apparent that work takes up a great deal of our lives.

The impact of overwork on our mental and physical health has been extensively documented – last year, 9.9 million working days in the UK were lost to work related stress or anxiety. People that work more than 11 hours a day are 2.5 times more likely to develop depression and more than 60 times more likely to develop heart disease. But overwork also negatively affects the health of our communities, our relationships and our democracy. A world in which we spend a great deal of our time in paid work is also a world in which we have far less time to spend with those around us, participating in democracy, getting to know our neighbours or taking an active role in the world outside of work.

If the full-time norm became 30 hours, or less, our communities could flourish. We'd have the time and energy to spend improving our local areas, time to organise and participate in community events and time to spend getting to know and caring for people around us. With more time, we might use local shops and markets more than big supermarkets, we might grow more of our own food and walk or cycle instead of drive. In short, we'd spend more time in our communities, rather than simply travelling through them, and our communities would flourish as a result.

