

21st Century McCarthyism – a 'Prevent' Cheat-Sheet

Islamophobic, manipulative, anti-democratic

What is Prevent and who does it affect?

'Prevent' is a government strategy said to be aimed at stopping people being drawn into terrorism. It is part of an over-arching counter-terrorism strategy called 'Contest'. Like the rest of 'Contest', 'Prevent' is closely linked to foreign policy and military strategy.

'Prevent' has been running since 2007, but wasn't part of the law until the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTSA) came into effect. Statutory *Prevent Duty Guidance* issued under CTSA for local authorities, schools and the NHS came into force on 1 July 2015. Statutory guidance for further and higher education came into effect on 18 September 2015.

Prevent will affect Third Sector organisations as well as public bodies. The Prevent Duty Guidance requires local authorities to include Prevent in "contracts and grants they make with and to any organisation performing a relevant function."

The security and intelligence agencies play key roles in the oversight and running of Prevent.

The government has defined extremism in the 'Prevent' strategy as "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values." The Government uses this definition of extremism as a vehicle for telling Muslims what is and is not acceptable for them to believe.

The *Prevent Duty Guidance* issued under the CTSA conflates anti-war activism by Muslims with "extremism", saying: "Islamist extremists regard Western intervention in Muslim-majority countries as a 'war with Islam', creating a narrative of 'them' and 'us'."

Large numbers of people are receiving 'Prevent' training as part of their work.

Counter-terrorism policy is reserved to Westminster; the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTSA) is Westminster legislation. But 'Prevent' involves many areas of public life that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Scotland has its own *Prevent Duty Guidance*, issued jointly by the UK and Scottish governments. The differences between the Scottish and English guidance are mostly concerned with administrative detail. Another difference is that, in addition to its core concerns about "Islamist extremism"; the Scottish guidance refers to "anti-sectarianism work". But in its key essentials the guidance for Scotland is the same as for England and Wales.

Individuals identified through 'Prevent' as being "at risk of radicalisation" are referred in England and Wales to the de-radicalisation programme called 'Channel', and in Scotland to the 'Prevent Professional Concerns' programme.

If children are identified through 'Prevent' as being "at risk of radicalisation", this can lead to them being taken into care.

Prevent has so far been rather low-key in Scotland. But the new legislation is likely to change that. The UK government's latest annual report on 'Contest' says that the legislation will lead to "a higher and uniform standard for our Prevent work across more sectors in all parts of the country."

No Scottish MPs took part in the debate on the *Prevent Duty Guidance* in the House of Commons in March. And there has been no debate on 'Prevent' at Holyrood.

Prevent activity in Scotland is overseen at the UK level by the Prevent sub-group of the Multi Agency CONTEST Board (MACBS) for Scotland.

Within Scotland, the Scottish Preventing Violent Extremism Unit (SPVEU) oversees and coordinates Prevent. The SPVEU is run jointly by the Scottish Government and Police Scotland with a small number of staff and a modest budget, and has been in operation since 2008.

Prevent indicators have been included for some years in the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) Framework for local authorities in Scotland.

What's Wrong with Prevent?

The 'Prevent' strategy is coercive propaganda that legitimises UK wars, institutionalises Islamophobia and intimidates Muslims who dissent from UK Government policy. It is Islamophobic, manipulative and anti-democratic.

'Prevent' is more likely to drive people to terrorism than to keep them from it.

The intelligence and security agencies and the police should have no role in shaping or monitoring political discourse in the UK.

The government's construction of an invented system of British values, its assumption of the superiority of these values, and their incorporation into a coercive strategy is inherently racist and reactionary and is being used in particular to promote Islamophobia.

The government's attempt in the name of "British values" to determine what Muslims may or may not believe is damaging to civil society, amounts to social engineering, and is unacceptable.

'Prevent' training spreads Islamophobia and promotes suspicion of the Muslim community.

Meetings and demos with an anti-war or pro-Palestine focus are at risk of being banned or obstructed if they are arranged by Muslim-oriented or Muslim-led groups. This is naked discrimination.

In England, extremely young children have been targeted by 'Prevent' as being "at risk of radicalisation".

Information gathered through the 'Prevent' programme is likely to be obtained by the UK's intelligence and security agencies, who are likely to share it with their counterparts working for repressive regimes overseas. This is particularly risky for people without UK citizenship (eg overseas students), who may as a result suffer torture and arbitrary imprisonment when overseas.

'Prevent' divides us. It intimidates Muslims and promotes Islamophobia amongst non-Muslims. We can't fight austerity and war unless we fight 'Prevent'.

How are people resisting Prevent?

The new law does not place any direct legal obligation on staff in public bodies or organisations affected by 'Prevent', or on people who use their services, to cooperate with Prevent. It is not a criminal offence to refuse to cooperate with Prevent.

The National Union of Students (NUS) and the University and College Union (UCU) voted to oppose 'Prevent' at their 2015 conferences. The NUS has instructed its officers not to engage with Prevent, and the UCU has called for its National Executive Committee to organise a boycott of Prevent.

It has been SACC policy for many years that people should avoid cooperating with Prevent, and that organisations and individuals should not accept funding linked to Prevent. This policy has been very successful in limiting the influence of 'Prevent' on progressive organisations and community groups.

We encourage people to continue to withhold cooperation from Prevent to the maximum extent they find practicable, and to be frank about the decisions they take and the problems that arise.

What Needs to be done?

'Prevent' must be scrapped; the Counter Terrorism and Security Act must be repealed. In the meantime:

The NUS and UCU will come under pressure to retreat from their stand against 'Prevent'. They need the support of other trade unionists and the public.

Other trade unions, especially UNISON and the EIS, need to take a firm stand against 'Prevent'. The likely impact of 'Prevent' on Scottish schools is an urgent concern.

Trade unions must support people who find themselves in difficulty because they have refused to cooperate with Prevent in their workplace, or have challenged specific aspects of Prevent in their workplace.

Efforts need to be made in workplaces affected by 'Prevent', in collaboration with trade unions, to counter the Islamophobic and pro-war outlook promoted amongst workers by 'Prevent' training.

SACC shares the concerns felt by many people over recruitment to the Islamic State, especially of young people. We believe that this issue is best dealt with through free, open and informed discussion of all the issues surrounding the Islamic State and British foreign policy, conducted in an environment that is as safe as possible for all the participants. This cannot be done except in spaces from which Prevent has been excluded.

We don't know enough about the way that 'Prevent' is being rolled out in Scotland. If you have encountered it, let us know. This could include policies, documentation or training you have come across in your workplace, or personal experiences of being on the receiving end of 'Prevent'. If you come across something that smells like 'Prevent' but isn't called 'Prevent', tell us about that too.

More Information

www.sacc.org.uk/prevent

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