

JACOBIN

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How Death Became Big Business **pg. 62**

Where Communists Live Forever **pg.73**

pg.8

THE WELFARE STATE CAN SURVIVE THE GREAT AGING



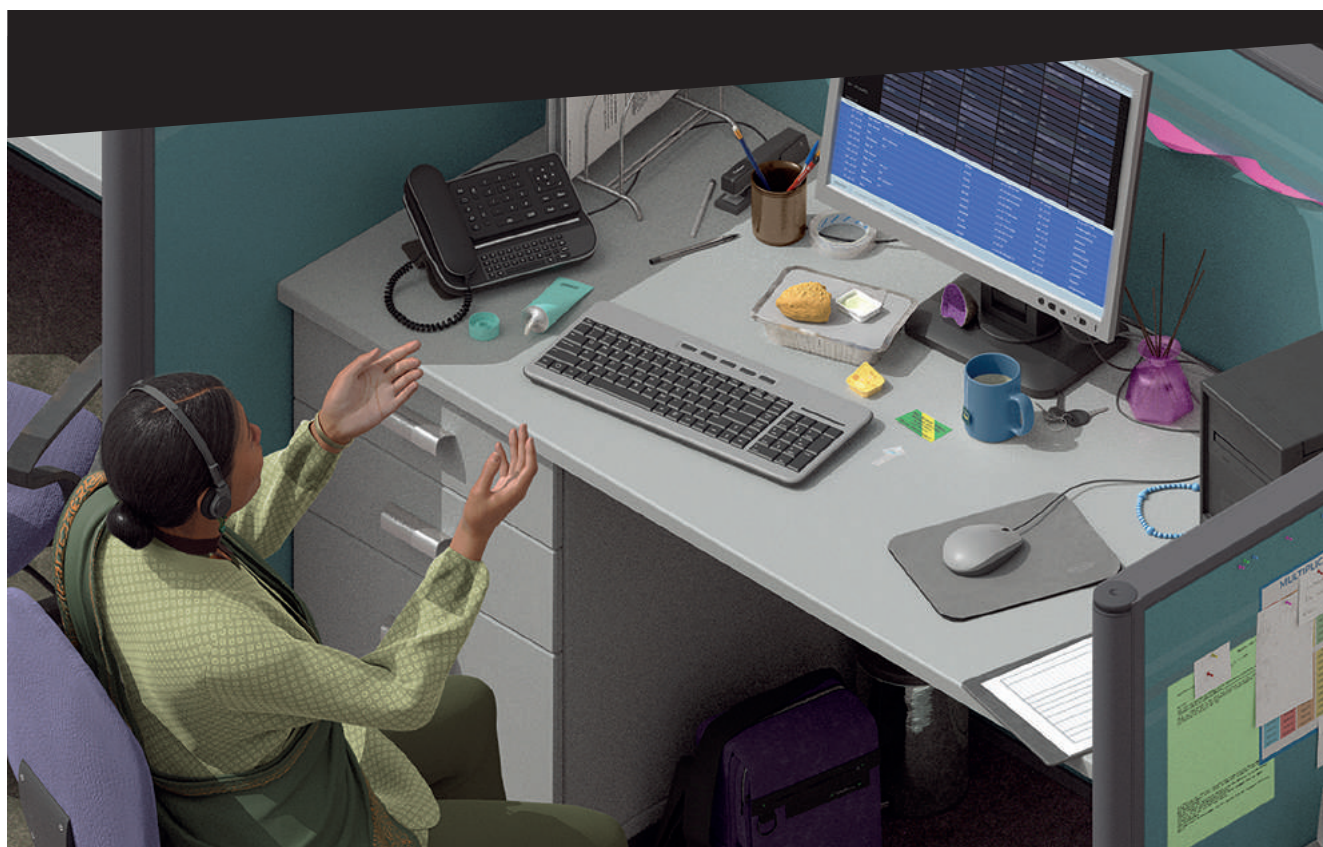
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"Patriots never live idly by reason of their old age. China had people such as Ma Fu Po. Our country had people such as Ly Thuong Kiet. The older they grew, the more energetic and heroic they became...."

Our children are young, they will do heavy work. We are old, we cannot do heavy work, but leaning on our sticks, we will take the lead to encourage them and impart our experiences to them. We are elders, we must sincerely unite first to set an example to our children."

— Ho Chi Minh, "Letter to Old People," 1945

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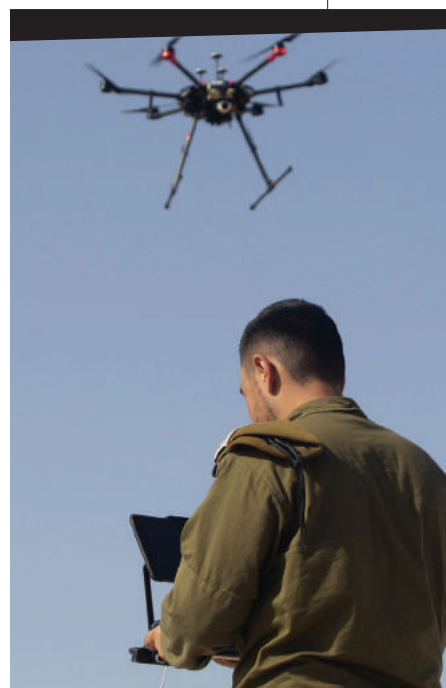
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Jacobin is a leading voice of the American left, offering socialist perspectives on politics, economics, and culture. The print magazine is released quarterly.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$39 US (print)

\$49 Canada (print)

\$59 international (print)

\$29 (digital)

Solidarity \$69

Institutions \$79

Lifetime \$395

388 Atlantic Avenue,
Brooklyn, NY 11217

jacobin.com/subscribe
subscriptions@jacobin.com

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BOOKSTORE DISTRIBUTION

Central Books (Europe)

Magazine Heaven

Media Solutions

One Source

Small Changes

TNG

CIRCULATION (SEPTEMBER 2023)

Magazine: 60,327

Web Visitors: 2,458,113

Jacobin (ISSN: 2470-6930) is published quarterly by Jacobin Foundation Ltd., 388 Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11217-3399. Periodical postage paid at 1050 Forbell St., Brooklyn, NY 11256-9602 and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Jacobin, 388 Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11217-3399.

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FRONT MATTERS



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**The welfare state can survive
the great aging** pg. 8

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living and dying** pg. 21

THE SOAPBOX

Letters

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Join our thriving community of letter writers.

► Against Power Politics

I am grateful for Chris Maisano's "Beyond Chomsky and Walzer" in the last issue of *Jacobin*, which is both generous and balanced. But I want to clarify what he calls my support for "American primacy" in world politics. So long as the society of states is radically unequal, I do prefer US hegemony to that of any other likely hegemon — for the same reasons that drove East European countries to prefer NATO to the Warsaw Pact. But I also believe that left politics requires opposition to every particular instance of hegemonic rule.

Just as we oppose a Russian sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and a Chinese sphere of influence in Southeast Asia, so should we oppose an American sphere of influence in Central America — or anywhere else. The critical principle here comes from the young Karl Marx, who wrote (in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*), "If you wish to influence other people you must be a

person who really has a stimulating and encouraging effect upon others." This principle applies also to states in the society of states, and the Left must stand against any other kind of "influence."

— Michael Walzer, New York, NY

► The Activist Factor

The articles in the last *Jacobin* do an excellent job of discussing the effects of the horrendous, misbegotten war on Iraq and the region today.

What is left out is a perspective of US antiwar activists. My family and I marched in February 2003 along with almost a million protesters (and many millions worldwide, in the largest antiwar protest in history) on the East Side of Manhattan, up Second Avenue and down First Avenue in the lead-up to the war. Unfortunately, it had no effect in stopping it.

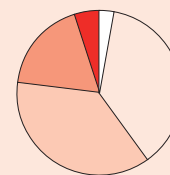
As I was an antiwar activist in the Vietnam War, I can't help but contrast that demonstration with the one in Sheep Meadow in Central Park in the early 1970s of half a million people that helped end that war.

— Lewis Grupper, New York, NY

A Grand Old Time

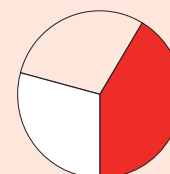
Many American retirees and Americans approaching retirement are far from enjoying their golden years.

How would you describe your retirement situation?



- ☐ Living the dream
- ☐ Comfortable
- ☐ Not good, not bad
- ☐ Struggling
- ☐ Living the nightmare

What will it take to achieve your dream retirement?



- ☐ Staying the course
- ☐ Sacrificing what I want today to save for later years
- ☐ Winning the lottery

Source: Schroders 2022 US Retirement Survey

The Internet Speaks

For just \$1,000,000, upload your consciousness to our comments section

▼
submissions@jacobin.com

My latest for *Jacobin*, a Marxist analysis of *Cocaine Bear* and the vulgar commodification of coked-up wild animals.

— @erallover

▼
An Oversight. Please Resubmit.

Jacobin has rejected my pitch for an article about how we need to nationalize Burger King and change it to Burger Republic.

— @timerube

▼
Jacobin: The Irish Diaspora Is Leading the Trade Union Revival in Britain

Reader: "Meanwhile, Sinn Féin runs the UAW."

— Benjamin E. Nardolilli, Brooklyn, NY

PARTY LINES

The Welfare State Can Survive the Great Aging

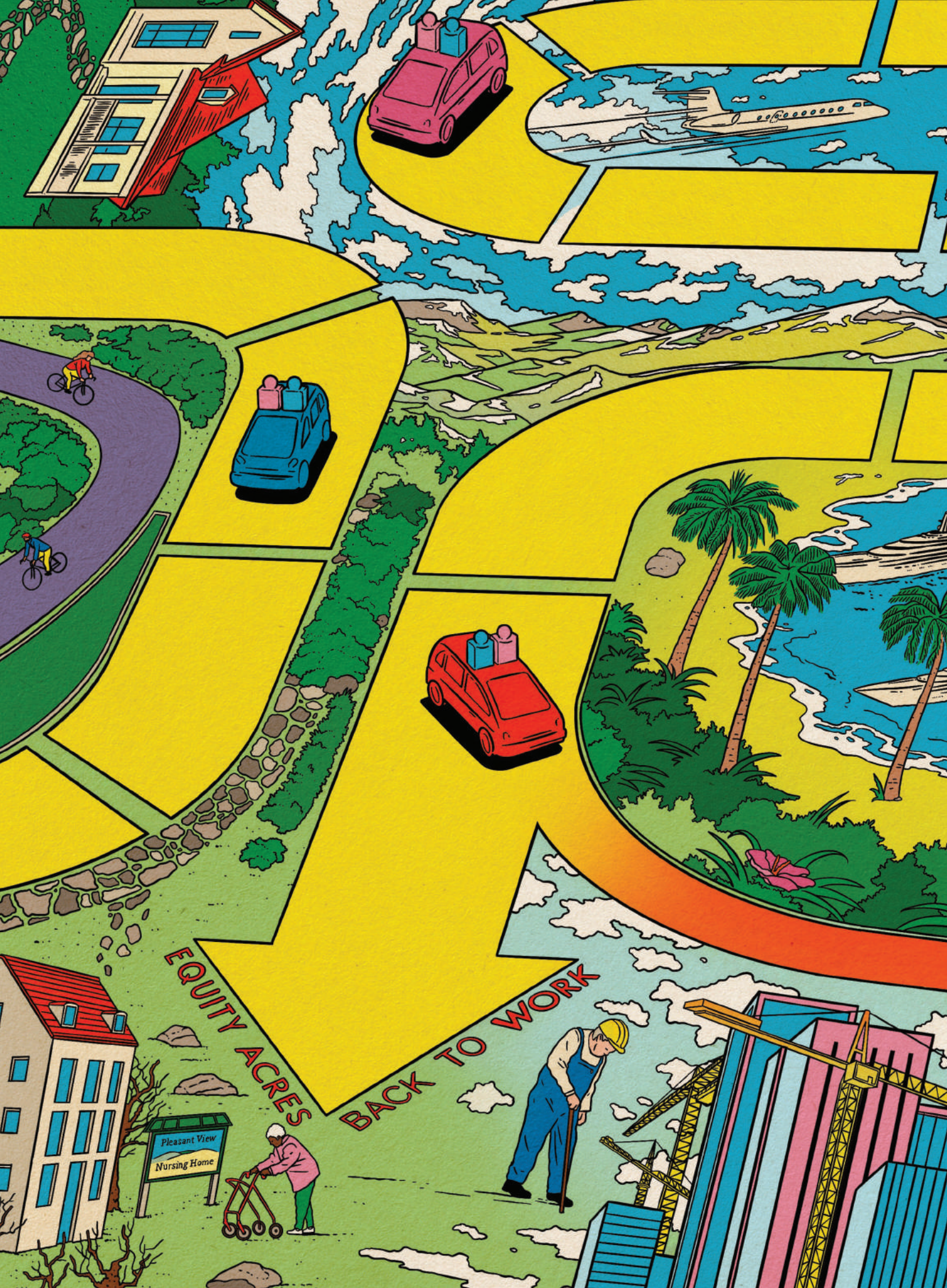
Workers spend their whole lives producing wealth for society, only to be told that being provided for in old age is impossible. It's not a rollback ordinary people should accept.

by Seth
Ackerman

Alongside the warming of the climate, the aging of the population — most prominently in the rich world but increasingly in poor countries as well — represents the most profound shift in the human condition we will face as the century advances. Global life expectancy, which stood at under 47 years in 1950, exceeds 72 today. That is a historically unprecedented change, and yet its impact has barely begun to be felt.

Between 1950 and 2022, the median age of the world's population increased by only eight years, from 22 to 30. But by the century's end, it will surge to 43. The numbers are even starker if we look at the rich world alone. In high-income countries, the median age has already risen from 28 to 41, and the over-65 share of the population has already increased two and a half times over, from 8 to 20 percent. By the end of the century, fully one-third of the rich countries' populations will be what we now consider to be retirement age — though by that point it's unlikely we will see it that way.

Aging is not, of course, an artifact of capitalism per se, and the problems it presents might not require any full-blown transformation of the mode of



EQUITY ACRES
BACK TO WORK

production, however desirable that might be on other grounds. But along with so much else, the prospects for socialist politics will be profoundly affected, one way or another, by how societies grapple with the demographic shift now underway.

If working-class movements have had a disproportionate impact on the way modern societies respond to the problems of aging, it's because those problems encapsulate in an especially pointed way the irreducible conflict between the logic of money and that of human need. The stark reality that needs are not distributed in proportion to people's ability to pay for them is experienced in its most universal form across the individual life course, chronologically, bookended on either side by the dependency of nonearning childhood and that of nonearning old age.

Red Pensions

At the outset of the industrial era, when aging first became a problem of public policy, workers already possessed their own autonomous organizations designed to mitigate the pain of poverty in old age. These were variously known as "friendly societies," *mutualités*, or *Hilfskassen*. They operated like insurance programs and were exposed to all the competitive hazards of commercial life.

But they also expressed the fever for civic association that gripped the industrial working class in the nineteenth century. As such, they were frequently the objects of suspicion on the part of the state and economic elites, who feared the democratic potential of such organizations of the "dangerous classes."

In the 1880s, faced with an ascendant socialist movement and anxious to wrest the loyalty of the German working class away from autonomous worker institutions, German chancellor Otto von Bismarck spearheaded the establishment of what was then the most comprehensive social insurance system in the world. Old-age pensions, first proposed by Bismarck in 1884 and finally legislated in 1889, quickly became the system's most popular component with workers.

Ever since, the ubiquitous phrase "Bismarckian welfare state" has served to create the misleading impression that the Iron Chancellor somehow dreamed up the idea of public social insurance by himself, as a masterstroke of paternalistic *realpolitik*. The truth is that both the demand for pensions and the political impetus behind their adoption came from the labor movement, as Bismarck himself alluded to in 1885.

"If there were no social democracy, and if a lot of people were not afraid of it," he said in parliament, "the modest progress we have made so far in social reform would not exist."

As a political maneuver, Bismarck's gambit proved to be a failure. It was the socialists, not the Junker statesman, who gained politically from the establishment of the pension and other social insurance programs. They were able to do this, on the one hand, by taking credit for the programs' creation; socialist spokesmen gleefully quoted Bismarck's admission on the hustings, constantly reminding working-class voters that anything the state might do to ameliorate their lot could be traced to fear of socialism.

At the same time, the socialists were able to capitalize on the issue by constantly denouncing the many aspects of Bismarck's system that fell short. As Friedrich Engels wrote in 1890, "the working class of Germany will take anything [the state] may offer them as an installment, but will not give up one jot of their principles and demands."

But those demands would change and evolve in the coming decades as socialist labor movements reevaluated their attitudes toward the welfare state. In the nineteenth century, workers' movements had invariably called for measures that primarily

The prospects for socialist politics will be profoundly affected by how societies grapple with the demographic shift now underway.

“Population aging” has been almost synonymous with austerity and market reform.



or exclusively benefited industrial workers. These were financed entirely by employers or from state coffers, requiring no contributions from workers themselves. In turn, they provided the same flat-rate benefits to all. This orientation was natural in an era when many workers lived so close to the subsistence level as to make mandatory contributions of any size unbearable.

But by the late 1950s, trade unions and their political allies finally came to embrace the idea that welfare programs should be made available to all citizens, not just the poor or industrial workers. In the case of pensions, whose purpose is to help the retired beneficiary maintain — as far as possible — the income standard he or she had enjoyed while working, such an approach could only be made meaningful if more affluent workers were granted bigger pensions in exchange for their larger contributions to the system.

The labor movement’s acceptance of this principle after World War II — visible especially in the debates over pension reforms in Sweden and Britain in the 1940s and 1950s — cleared the way for the postwar transformation of public pension systems, from financially modest programs intended merely to keep relatively poor workers from slipping into destitution into massive national savings vehicles that aimed to replace working-age incomes during retirement. From unskilled operatives to affluent professionals, these new systems benefited everyone. For the first time in history, a minimally comfortable old-age retirement was now, at least in the rich countries, within the reach of most citizens.

This was a historic achievement. But by the 1970s, population aging was putting ever greater actuarial pressure on public pension systems. Since then, “pension reform” — a phrase that invariably connotes

cutbacks and privatization — has been a constant feature of the policy landscape throughout the rich world. In fact, the political valence of the aging question entirely changed its colors over the course of this period. For the first three-quarters of the century, the problems of aging had been a motor of social democratic expansion. For most of the decades since, “population aging” has been almost synonymous with austerity and market reform.

Austerity Rollbacks

In the United States, we got a first taste of this process with the Greenspan Commission, appointed by Ronald Reagan and Congress in 1981, which resulted in the bipartisan Social Security Amendments of 1983. That law gradually raised the retirement age from 65 to 67 (the long phase-in period finally culminated without fanfare in 2022), and the net result has been a 13 percent cut in effective social security benefits compared to what they would be today if the full retirement age were still 65.

Subsequently, a long series of further cutbacks and privatizations received consideration at one time or another, from George W. Bush’s abortive 2005 Social Security privatization (the keystone of his ill-fated “ownership society” initiative) to the 2011 Bowles-Simpson plan, which came close to passing and would have done serious damage to Social Security — raising the retirement age to 69 and cutting benefits a further 13 percent by changing the cost-of-living adjustment. That plan was effectively authored by

The Coming Long-Term
Care Crisis

Rethinking
Care

The US’s Neglect of the Elderly
Has Turned Murderous

Why We Need
the Welfare State

Retirement Rhetoric

Not that you'll ever need it, at this rate.

403(b)

A tax-deferred retirement savings plan for public school employees and workers at certain tax-exempt institutions that is functionally equivalent to the traditional 401(k) offered by private companies. Also known as a tax-sheltered annuity (TSA) plan.

Annual rate of return

The net loss or gain in the value of an investment over a one-year period, rendered as a percentage of the initial cost of the investment.

Annuities

A life insurance contract that guarantees its purchaser a certain amount of money paid out in a series of fixed sums along a set timeline, often deferred by the investor to serve as an income stream during retirement.

Cliff vesting

A form of payout in which a worker receives full ownership of an equity award on a given date rather than gradually — and receives nothing if said worker leaves the company before that date.

Defined benefit plan

A company-sponsored pension plan in which payments are dependent on the recipient's longevity at the company and earnings at the time of retirement.



Estate

All the assets and liabilities belonging to a person at the time of their death.

none other than Bruce Reed, currently Joe Biden's deputy chief of staff, who served as the Bowles-Simpson staff director.

The story has been the same in countries around the world, most explosively in France, where President Emmanuel Macron endlessly invoked rising life expectancy levels to justify his proposed pension cutbacks this year in the face of nationwide demonstrations and rioting.

When it comes to the impact of aging on the welfare state, the key metric is the "old-age dependency ratio" — the number of seniors in the population relative to the number of working-age adults. That figure, which in 1950 stood at around 15 percent in both the

United States and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), had climbed to roughly 20 percent by 1990. Today it's close to 30 percent. By 2050, it's projected to reach 40 percent in the United States and surpass 50 percent in the OECD as a whole.

As that US-OECD gap suggests, dependency ratios vary widely from country to country, spanning from 10–20 percent in middle-income developing countries like India, China, and Brazil; to 30–35 percent in the rich anglophone countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia (Ireland is the outlier at 26 percent); to 35–40 percent in most of what Donald

How Spain Shamed Itself by Leaving the Elderly to Die Under Coronavirus

Canadian Pension Funds Are Financing the Exploitation of the Elderly

We All Deserve a Death With Dignity

Fiduciary

A person or board given control over or entrusted with the responsibility to administer assets held in trust for a given purpose.

Individual retirement account (IRA)

Tax-advantaged personal savings plans for which contributions may be tax-deductible.

Roth IRA

An individual retirement account for individuals making less than a certain amount of money in which annual contributions up to \$6,500 (or \$7,500 above age 50) are deposited after-tax and available after the age of 59½ for tax-free withdrawal.

**Social Security**

A federal insurance program that serves elderly, disabled, and unemployed Americans. All working Americans pay into Social Security and subsequently receive monthly benefits that correspond to their lifetime earnings.

Target date fund

A fund that invests in a variety of stocks, bonds, and other securities with the goal of growing assets to a certain amount by a certain time, usually the time of retirement. Also known as an age-based or life-cycle fund.

Solo 401(k)

A type of 401(k) plan available to self-employed individuals. It has a higher contribution limit than an employer-sponsored 401(k).

Thrift Savings Plan

A tax-deferred retirement savings plan for federal employees and uniformed service members that is functionally equivalent to the traditional 401(k) offered by private companies.

Traditional 401(k)

A company-sponsored defined contribution retirement plan that allows employees to contribute a percentage of their income to a retirement account and defer taxes until withdrawal. Employers may match employee contributions up to a certain point.

Rumsfeld liked to call “Old Europe” (the 15 countries of the pre–Eastern enlargement European Union).

Much of that diversity, however, is set to vanish in the coming decades. That’s because the surge in dependency ratios worldwide will be disproportionately rapid in the developing world, bringing about a dramatic convergence across nations. By 2050, countries like Turkey, Brazil, and Colombia — where ratios are currently in the 15–20 percent range — will see their figures rise to the 35–40 percent range, the same as France and Belgium today.

Just as Karl Marx said of England during the Industrial Revolution, the graying populations of the rich countries are showing the rest of the world its future.

The Wrong Crisis

Of course, the problem with rising dependency ratios is that they worsen the trade-off between the incomes of retirees and nonretirees. All else equal, more retirees per worker must mean either lower average pensions (and other benefits) for retirees or a larger share of nonretiree income diverted toward the financing of those benefits.

This is the logic behind the ubiquitous discourse of “generational warfare,” a favorite theme of those who advocate cutting back public retirement programs. The Boston University economist Laurence Kotlikoff has made a specialty of what he

Emmanuel Macron’s Plan to Raise the Pension Age Is Class War

The Lack of Hospital Beds Is a National Crisis

Why We Should Fight for the Veterans Health Administration

calls “generational accounting,” which purports to calculate the financial “burden” the elderly impose on younger generations. Kotlikoff’s methods have been widely debunked (among other things, he relies on implausible and arbitrary discount rates to estimate the burden of taxation on younger cohorts), yet the rhetoric of generational parasitism is still rife in public discussions of aging and the welfare state.

The fact that longer life spans, coexisting with mostly unchanged retirement ages, mean more and more years of life spent out of work in old age, is widely spoken of as if it were self-evidently a problem — as if there were something inherently perverse about the lengthening of retirement as a stage of life. But longer retirements are a perfectly legitimate way for modern societies to enjoy the benefits of rising productivity. Whether or not they’re the *best* way to do so is a matter for democratic debate. The more of our productivity growth we take in the form of longer retirements, the less we can take in the form of shorter working hours or higher consumption, including collective consumption.

A few numbers can illustrate the dimensions of the problem. Countries in the OECD spend an average of almost 8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) on pensions. Meanwhile, the OECD-wide dependency ratio is projected to rise from 33 to 53 percent, or roughly three-fifths, between now and 2050. To keep pension benefits stable relative to current incomes, therefore, total pension spending — and thus total taxes — will have to rise by nearly 5 percent of income per working-age adult. That sounds like a lot — and it is.

But if productivity rises by, say, 1 percent per year, incomes per hour of work will be more than 30 percent higher in 2050 than they are today. A five-percentage-point increase in tax rates would thus absorb only one-sixth of the growth of incomes, leav-

ing the remaining five-sixths available for greater consumption or leisure for the working-age population.

Of course, the conclusions to draw from these numbers aren’t self-evident. Increasing tax rates by five percentage points is hardly painless under the best of circumstances; how we judge that scenario depends on how much we collectively value the number of years spent in retirement relative to the possibilities of greater leisure or more consumption during our working lives.

It may seem that the sensible, equitable response to population aging is to simply raise the retirement age over time to match the advancing level of life expectancy. But from an egalitarian perspective, this presents a serious problem: in the absence of offsetting measures, requiring people to spend more years working in old age to qualify for a full pension massively benefits affluent professionals — who tend to live longer, remain in better health, and more often find their jobs rewarding — at the expense of less advantaged members of the working class.

In the United States, for example, men aged 50 with a college degree can expect to live an additional 34.2 years, compared to 26.5 years for men lacking a high school diploma. And that nearly eight-year gap is a moving target — it’s widening at a rate of nearly 1.5 years per decade.

For this reason, many countries have adopted, and many others are considering, schemes to classify jobs according to what the French call *pénibilité*, or arduousness. In the past decade, France has adopted an elaborate system that specifies job characteristics — including night work, variable shifts, repetitive tasks, and exposure to extreme temperatures and noise — that can entitle workers to take full pensions at an earlier point than under standard rules. Workers with such jobs in their career histories are credited by the pension system with points that can be used in later years to take earlier retirement, to switch to part-time work without incurring lower pension benefits, or to finance further education to help in changing occupations.

**The graying populations
of the rich countries
are showing the rest of
the world its future.**



Capitalists Want Your Retirement
to Be Miserable

Nursing Home Worker: “Everything About
This Is Designed for Disaster”

In fact, 22 of the 27 European Union member states already have such systems, though few are as comprehensive as the French version. They are notable because they make it possible, as life spans lengthen, to push forward standard retirement ages without disproportionately harming the more vulnerable strata of workers who tend to occupy such hazardous forms of employment.

Is that a bargain workers ought to accept?

If the aging of the population presents us with the looming prospect of a meltdown of the modern welfare state — as establishment voices have been insisting for decades — then there might be a case for giving prudent consideration to options like *pénibilité*-adjusted increases in the retirement age, if only to avoid more sinister attacks on public pensions.

But as it turns out, the “staggering” increases in pension costs that are so much talked about are only staggering because of how shockingly small they are. According to OECD projections, by 2050, given current demographic trends and assuming no change in existing pension rules and benefit formulas, the median G7 country is expected to see spending on public pensions rise by a mere 0.8 percent of GDP. (That median country happens to be Italy, which is widely but wrongly assumed to be a pensions basket case.)

In fact, every G7 nation except Germany is projected to see pension spending rise by less than 1 percent of GDP — and in the case of France and Japan, spending as a share of GDP is set to fall.

How can pension spending decline amid ever-increasing dependency ratios? The answer is simple: around the world, the four-decade-long wave of pension cutbacks has already programmed so many increases in retirement ages and reductions in earnings replacement levels that the impact of rising life expectancy has been almost completely neutralized.

The long-advertised crisis of the welfare state supposedly rendered inevitable by the

pressures of population aging has now been almost entirely averted — and the implications of this silent change are profound. The decades-long era, starting in the 1970s, during which population aging served as a motor of neoliberal policy reform, has for the most part come to an end. The failure of George W. Bush’s proposed Social Security privatization and the Bowles-Simpson commission’s attempted gutting of Social Security can be seen as turning points in retrospect: canaries in the coal mine for would-be pension “reformers” bent on dismantling the public social insurance state.

In the most advanced welfare states of the rich world, concern among policy elites is already beginning to shift from the problem of pension system “solvency” to what is politely euphemized as “adequacy” — that is, the prospect that more and more retirees will find themselves destitute in old age. Battles over financing for long-term care and price gouging by prescription drug makers are replacing the familiar drumbeat of calls for “modernizing” (read: privatizing) existing retirement programs. We may be witnessing the start of a new cycle, in which the problems of aging once again serve as a motor for social democratic reform. The Left should take heed and start formulating its demands now. ■

“In the New Deal period, there was a real promise for what was called cradle-to-grave security, the idea that people would have something provided for them throughout their whole lives so they wouldn’t have to live in poverty. Franklin Delano Roosevelt famously called this the ‘freedom from want’ that he said everyone should enjoy equally. Of course, that was a totally unrealized promise.... Now we’re moving more and more toward what capital wants, which is to not have any social support through social security. In short, to more completely commodify workers and their labor. They want that because it makes us more exploitable.... Businesses love dependent workers, because you can do whatever you want to them. You can boss them around, you can pay them poverty wages, you don’t need to provide benefits, and you can work them in unsafe conditions. From the capitalist’s perspective, that’s good for business. It’s not good for business when people say, ‘I have savings. I don’t need to work here. I’m retiring early.’ That’s not good. Desperate workers make happy managers.”

Worked to
Death

STRUGGLE SESSION



What France's Retirees Are Fighting For

Now under siege, France's state-run pension system has delivered a decent standard of living to millions — a reality that retired telecom workers in Marseille have experienced firsthand.

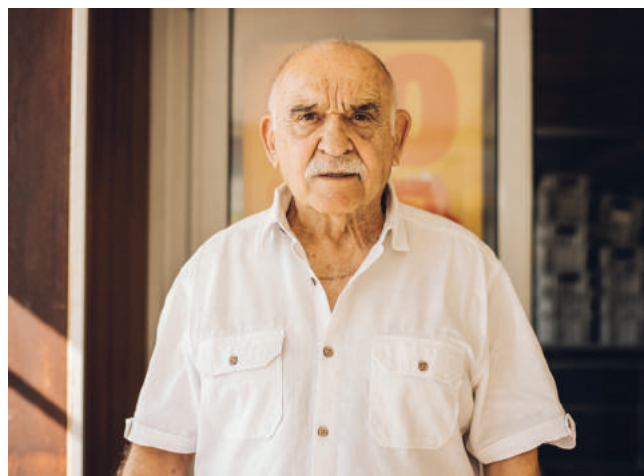
by Cole
Stangler

It's a Monday morning in June, and the sun is beating down on a postwar housing tower in the northern Marseille neighborhood of Malpassé, a sleepy residential quarter a world away from the bustling city center. While it's hard to spot the union hall from a distance, the red-and-yellow stickers near the door leave no doubt: this is the home of the local telecom workers branch of the CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail).

Today the space is reserved for the weekly meeting of the union's retiree section — a ritual that's as much about conducting official business as it is a chance for the roughly two dozen attendees to spend some quality time together. The group typically sets aside the first hour and a half for catching

Opposite: Former CGT workers Gérard and Denis talk during the weekly meeting of the union retiree section.

Below: Jean-Paul, 81, poses in front of a CGT poster.



Maryse, 76, poses in front of the door adorned with CGT stickers.



up before heading out to lunch at La Gratinée, a Corsican restaurant run by former CGT activists from the city's port. When the crew returns to the office, the meeting kicks off. While it naturally involves plotting out actions — a mix of demonstrations, petitions, and letter-writing campaigns — it typically starts with an open-ended discussion of the news.

"We talk about everything, and we don't hesitate to speak our minds," explains Jean-Paul, eighty-one, who began his career as a clerk in the post office before becoming an operations agent for the old public phone company, both of which used to be overseen by the same state-owned entity. "It's true democracy in action!"

"A lot of the time, we don't know the topic of discussion beforehand," chimes in Maryse, a seventy-six-year-old who also worked at the phone company, mostly as an operations agent overseeing billing. "It helps us think, too. Sometimes you show up with a

strong point of view and then, after the discussion, you realize you might not be right."

These last few weeks, though, the group has been discussing something they pretty much all agree on: President Emmanuel Macron's hike in the retirement eligibility age from sixty-two to sixty-four marks an indefensible attack on a system that, though imperfect, has delivered decent living standards to millions of people.

And they would know — they've experienced the benefits firsthand.

The French system has never managed to eradicate all the inequalities accumulated at the workplace: Benefits hinge on career earnings, leaving millions of low-wage workers with the justifiable sense that they deserve more. Workers who take extended breaks during their careers are penalized. Women, on average, earn less generous benefits than men.

But the system does extend an invaluable lifeline, providing income and time for many to enjoy their golden years with a sense of comfort and stability.

After paying into Social Security throughout their careers, the overwhelming majority of seniors in France don't have to rely on supplemental private schemes to make do. Monthly pension benefits cover about three-quarters of preretirement earnings, a more favorable rate than public systems in the United States, United Kingdom, or Germany. Maryse, for instance, earns a monthly pension of €1,900 (\$2,100), while Jean-Paul receives €2,200 (\$2,400) — both levels around France's median income.

While far from extravagant, it's why France has one of the lowest rates of senior poverty in the developed world. While nearly a quarter of the US population over sixty-five falls below the OECD's definition of the poverty line, only 4 percent of France's does.

But perhaps just as important, the French model offers pensioners the ability to benefit from time

"We talk about everything, and we don't hesitate to speak our minds. It's true democracy in action!"

away from work — a value its architects unabashedly championed. While the standard retirement age during their careers was sixty, Jean-Paul and Maryse were both able to retire at age fifty-five — the product of a sectorwide collective bargaining agreement following the breakup of their state-managed employer.

Either way, that free time is nearly impossible to put a price on.

Continuing the discussion in a side office at the union hall, Jean-Paul recalled how he used to take his grandchildren skiing — a memory he'd thought a lot about during the pension reform movement. "I was telling my grandson, 'Do you remember how, when you were little, we used to take you skiing? It's because we were in shape! If we were old, we wouldn't have been able to.' It's extraordinary to be able to have that time with your grandchildren. That's why raising the retirement age by two years is such a calamity. It's reducing the amount of time people have while they're in shape."

The retirees aren't only focusing on family life either. They've devoted much of their time to group travel, pooling together resources to finance trips across France and around the world. "We've known each other for fifty years — we've worked together, we've been activists together. All that helps for organizing hobbies together," Maryse explained.

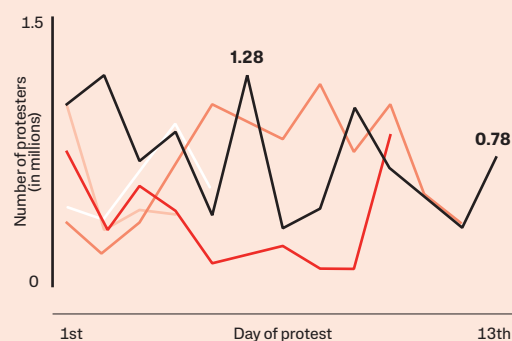
Shortly after retirement, the friend group created a small nonprofit that they still manage together. Every month, participants chip in €120 to €150 — a sum that goes toward organizing an annual trip to one of France's 101 *départements*. Because these are union activists, the visits often include detours to sites of historical or political interest. In the Lyon region, for instance, the group made sure to visit the a museum of the French resistance and the Maison des Canuts, which commemorates early nineteenth-century silk workers known for their bloody industrial revolts. "I think it maintains us intellectually, too," said Maryse. "Keeping up the search for knowledge is important."

Sometimes, the group travels abroad. So far they've gone to Cuba, Peru, Mexico, Guatemala, Canada, Ireland, and Iceland. "We haven't gone to the United States because communists aren't allowed there," Jean-Paul said with a laugh. "We try to understand people. In every country, people basically want the same thing: happiness. Not money but happiness."

Ripe Old Rage

The French have a long history of protesting pension reforms.

Protesters at Demonstrations Against Pension Reforms in France (1995–2023)



1995

Center-right president Jacques Chirac is met with the largest social uprising in France since 1968 following the government's announcement of plans to reduce social security via pension reform. After mass strikes, it is forced to relent on key parts of its program.

2003

Chirac's minister of social affairs, François Fillon, manages to pass a controversial pension reform that extends the length of time public sector workers must contribute to the pension system before retiring themselves from 37.5 years to 40 years — comparable to the private sector.

2010

Conservative president Nicolas Sarkozy fights popular opposition to raise the retirement age for public sector employees from 60 to 62 and further increase the work requirement to access a full pension to 41.5 years.

2019–2020

President Emmanuel Macron proposes a new, universal pension system that would again raise the retirement age for many jobs. Pensions would no longer correlate with years worked but with contributions made during a lifetime, meaning that many would end up working longer for less than previous generations. After the longest strike in modern French history, the proposal is withdrawn.

2023

After years of quiet on the pension front due to COVID-19, the government, helmed by Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne, passes a reform hiking the retirement age from 62 to 64 and the work requirement to 43 years on the job. A repeal effort helmed by Macron's own centrist party failed in the National Assembly in June.

Maryse, Gilbert, Gérard, and Marie-Claude prepare leaflets to send to CGT members announcing an all-union day of strike and demonstration on October 13, 2023.

But they have noticed something a little less uplifting on their foreign trips: oftentimes, people their age are still working. “In Canada, the guy who was hosting me was seventy years old,” Maryse recalled. “He’d spent his whole life as a car salesman. But he had to work as a janitor at a pharmacy because he didn’t have enough saved up for retirement.”

Scenes like that could soon become increasingly common in France, thanks to Macron’s unpopular reforms — which, ironically, garnered some of their highest levels of support among pensioners. When asked about that polling, Jean-Paul shook his head. He described the scene at one of the many anti-reform marches in central Marseille where CGT retirees turned out in force.

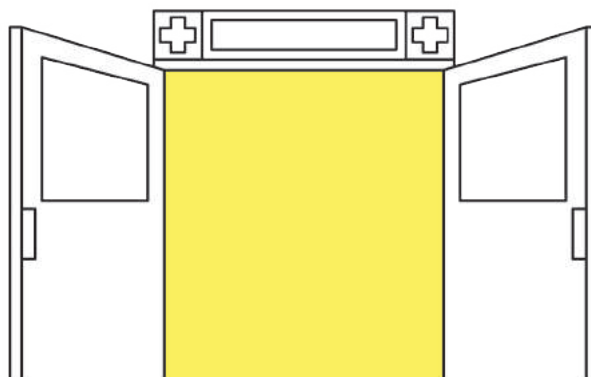
“We were next to the high schoolers, and it was so much fun. They had all these magnificent posters,” he said. “It shows that it’s not one’s age that matters, it’s ideas. You can be young and have great ideas, and be old and have bad ideas.” ■



Stardust to Stardust

On January 23, 2019, renowned Marxist sociologist and *Jacobin* contributor Erik Olin Wright died of acute myeloid leukemia.

During his battle with cancer, Wright maintained a blog whose entries Haymarket Books later published as *Stardust to Stardust: Reflections on Living and Dying*. Wright was an optimist and a sharp political thinker to the end, drawing closer to his family, contemplating the relationship between love and solidarity, and describing a final real utopia he discovered in his hospital ward.



April 18, 2018,
during his first round of
chemotherapy

"Human life is a wild, extraordinary phenomenon: elements are brewed in the center of stars and exploding supernova, and spewed across the universe. They eventually clump into a minor planet around a modest star; then, after some billions of years, this 'star dust' becomes complex molecules with self-replicating capacities that we call life. More billions of years pass and these self-replicating molecules join together into more complex forms, evolve into organisms that gain awareness and then consciousness, and finally, eventually, consciousness of their consciousness — stardust turned into conscious living matter aware of its own existence. And with that comes consciousness of mortality.

"The extraordinary and wonderful thing in all this is to be alive and aware of being alive. Most matter in the universe is neither living nor conscious. That I, as a conscious being, will cease to exist pales in significance to the fact that I exist at all. I don't find that this robs my existence of meaning; it's what makes infusing life with meaning possible."

April 30, 2018,
on how his illness has altered his
conception of solidarity

"What I now see clearly is that community and solidarity as normative ideals are deeply connected to love as a reality in the lives of people. The ideal of ever-expanding and more encompassing webs of solidarity and community as part of the real utopian aspiration for a good society also means enlarging the ways love permeates social relations. The most poignant realization of this for me right now, in the present moment, is the 27-million-person registry of stem cell donors, and the three people who have now been identified as perfect matches. These three people somewhere in the world have volunteered to help save my life. Strangers I will never meet, but we are bound together by love."



May 22, 2018,
while preparing to receive a
bone marrow transplant

"At this very moment, there are, I imagine, thousands of people around the world with acute myeloid leukemia who will simply die without ever knowing what hit them, with no access to any treatment. There are others in crowded and unsatisfactory hospitals, and no prospect of access to the stem cell transplants that might save their lives.... Nothing whatsoever about the injustices of the world would be improved if I unilaterally rejected this privilege. This fact, however, does not make my privileged access to the care I am receiving fair or just. It creates a divide between me and others who face in exactly the same way as I do an uncertain hold on life but without access to the care they need. This is a moment when I have come to feel — *deeply feel*, I think — the universality of my experience and the ways this illness makes me just like other people. But that oneness, that sense of compassionate softening of the boundary of the self, is undermined by the realities of my extraordinary privilege. I'm not quite sure how to describe the emotion this invokes in me, but it is something like grief."

October 20, 2018, on the “real utopia” he discovered in his hospital’s cancer ward

“Many people have remarked on my fortitude, resilience, optimism. It is true that I am lucky in having such dispositions. But I doubt if I could have sustained them in anywhere near as robust a way without the kind of protective social environment in which I have been living. My weeks here — twelve altogether, including the initial spring stay — bring home in a powerful way such a basic sociological idea: individual capacities flourish or flounder depending on the social environment in which they exist. My capacity for resilient optimism flourishes here rather than getting beaten down by worries and impersonal treatment. So, an outside observer might attribute this all to my internal dispositions; the reality is that those dispositions are real, but they would not be sufficient without these wonderful conditions.”

December 8, 2018, spending time with his family after the reappearance of his cancer

“We hung out in the wonderful family respite room much of the day — Marcia, Jenny, Becky, Ida, and me. I went on and on about love, fullness, happiness ‘all the way down’ and how this was unsullied by the physical state I was in or the prospect of dying. Then at 3:00 p.m. I needed to return to room 31 for my chemo. I stood up. It is a two-minute walk. I suddenly felt unglued. That is the word and image that came to mind. Like there was a wall with nicely glued seams that started to leak

and then began to burst — a wooden wall that was also a dam of some sort. It burst and I was overwhelmed with emotion — a flood of emotion? I was walking ahead of Marcia and staggered down the corridor. Spleen pain once again. I had been trying to stretch the pain medication. The pain was not all that terrible, but it played into the inner sense of things falling apart. I fell into bed. Soon the intensity subsided. The emotional flood retreated. I slept a little and awoke reglued.

“This isn’t in any way shocking, certainly not surprising, or even disturbing. I *am* deeply happy, and I *am* deathly ill. That is the reality/unreality in which I live. Maybe there is nothing more to figure out.”

December 9, 2018, Skyping into a seminar while undergoing another round of chemotherapy

“Nearly two-hour Skype seminar with a reading group of Canadian activists in which David Calnitsky’s younger sister, Shauna, is involved. They read the final version of *How to Be an Anticapitalist*. The session was beautiful, completely absorbing and inspiring for me. It felt wonderful to be in such deep dialogue with young activists. I was asked how I managed to remain so optimistic and hopeful. I said it was an interesting question at this specific moment because optimism/hope refers both to my body and to the world. I explained why I disagreed with Gramsci’s aphorism about optimism of the will and pessimism of the intellect — without some optimism of the intellect it wasn’t possible to sustain optimism of the will. Besides, it is too easy to be pessimistic; there is no intellectual challenge there. Optimism takes work!”



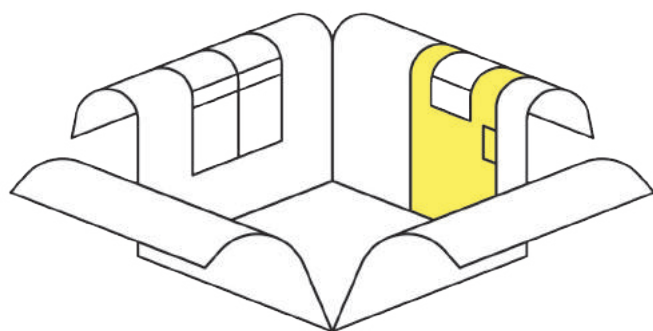
December 12, 2018, in conversation with his doctor, Laura Michaelis

“I then told her about my nightmare of December 1. Here’s what I wrote in the blog on December 2, the day after that dream:

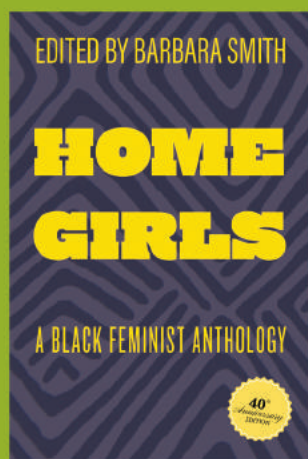
I opened a door to a room that was filled with everyone I love and who loves me and they were all laughing at me, mocking my efforts to understand my illness in my blog, saying I was ridiculous. I let out a scream and woke up sobbing, gasping. This, I feel, was the worst nightmare possible — the very foundation of my life, love, became empty. I have firmer beliefs in the love I experience in the world than in my critique of capitalism. If love is false, there is nothing, nothing.

“Laura then quietly said, ‘You know Erik, I am a Catholic. This is just what Jesus said on the cross during the crucifixion: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.”’

“These are perhaps the most important words Jesus spoke in the central narrative of the crucifixion. I imagine they are the words from the Gospels that are most familiar to people. We were both crying but continued to talk. The deep parallel between Jesus’s deepest moment of despair and mine was profound. I’m sure that my unconscious was not tapping into these words from scripture in my dream; they were a direct expression of a universal fear — utter, total abandonment by the most fundamental source of meaning in one’s life. The Christian God is the God of Love, or perhaps as some Christians would express it, God IS Love. Jesus’s despair is therefore: why has Love forsaken me? ‘If love is false, there is nothing, nothing’ is how I experienced this.” ■



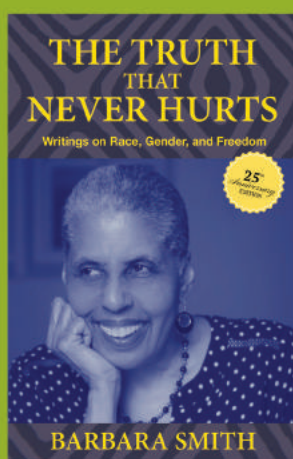
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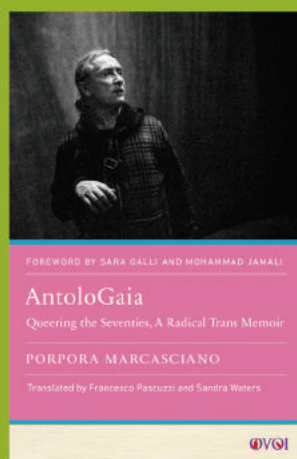
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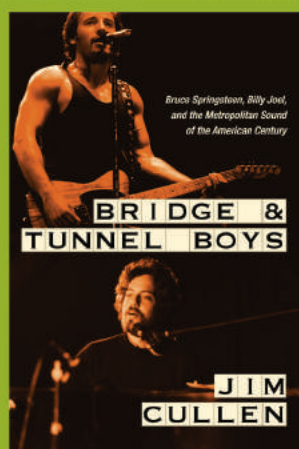
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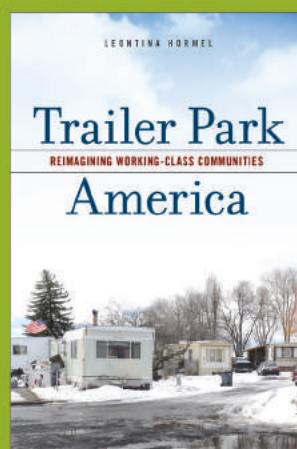
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Race and Police
The Origin of Our Peculiar Institutions
Ben Brucato

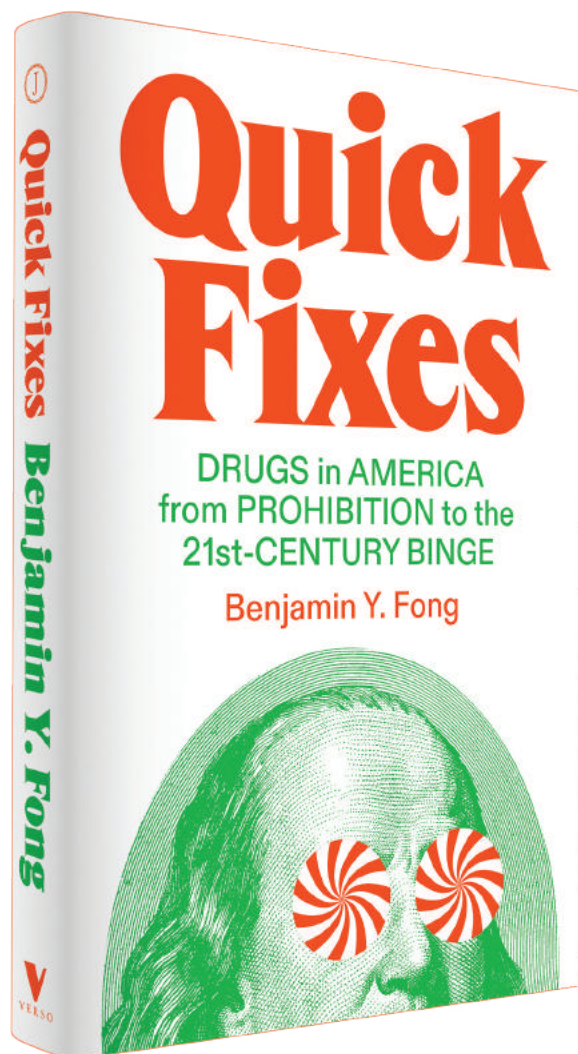
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examination of where we are, how we got here, and why exactly
we’re all so blitzed.” —Amber A’Lee Frost, *Chapo Trap House*

JACOBIN



CULTURAL CAPITAL



P. 26 THE MAKING OF MILLENNIAL SOCIALISM

Why are people born in the late 20th century more open to socialism than any previous generation in American history?

P. 41 THE LOST MATRIARCHS OF HOLLYWOOD

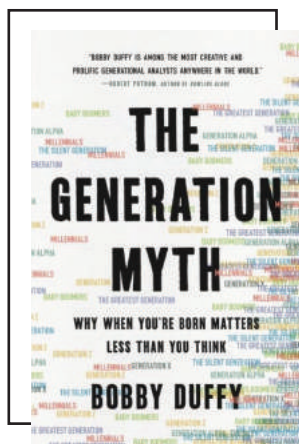
American cinema was once full of formidable, charismatic older women. What happened to them?

THE MAKING OF MILLENNIAL SOCIALISM

BY CHRIS MAISANO

Why are people born in the late 20th century more open to socialism than any previous generation in American history?

Review of *The Generation Myth: Why When You're Born Matters Less Than You Think*
by Bobby Duffy (Basic Books, 2021)



"DON'T TRUST ANYONE OVER THIRTY." This iconic 1960s phrase was coined by Jack Weinberg, a leader of the Free Speech Movement at the University of California, Berkeley. In Weinberg's telling, he almost thoughtlessly tossed the line off during an interview with a reporter whose questioning implied that student activists were just a bunch of Communist dupes. "I told him we had a saying in the movement that we don't trust anybody over thirty," Weinberg recalled. "It was a way of telling the guy to back off, that nobody was pulling our strings." But the phrase took on a life of its own and became something of a slogan for "the '60s" as a whole — youthful rebellion against a stultifying mass consumer society built by colorless middle-aged men in gray flannel suits. Against Weinberg's intentions, it became an enduring call to arms in the battle between generations.

As a civil rights, free speech, and antiwar activist, Weinberg was a paradigmatic example of a New Left militant. What made the New Left new was its ostensible break with the Old Left of the 1930s and '40s. There were good reasons for making this distinction. The Old Left was grounded in working-class, often immigrant, social milieus that found organizational expression in the Socialist and Communist parties



Mario Savio, a Berkeley Free Speech Movement leader best known for his “Bodies Upon the Gears” speech, is pictured with fellow arrested demonstrators during trial in Berkeley, California, 1965.

as well as the trade unions. Nascent New Leftists were brought up after World War II, in a rapidly changing society defined by the growth of higher education, the burgeoning shift from industrial to service work, and the dissolution of ethnic proletarian communities. As a result, the New Left evinced a strong concern with movements and demands that hadn’t yet emerged in the New Deal period, and it had a fundamental commitment to “participatory democracy” that the Old Left did not share.

It’s not surprising, then, that New Leftists had a powerful sense of generational identity. The Port Huron Statement’s introduction is titled “Agenda for a Generation.” Its memorable first line, penned by a twenty-two-year-old Tom Hayden, is “We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit.” An Old Left manifesto would not have begun with an admission that it did not necessarily speak for an oppressed proletariat.

Despite real generational differences, however, there was never a bright line separating the Old and New Lefts from each other. Historian Maurice Isserman, in his classic study *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left*, writes that he “gradually came to understand that the early New Left had emerged from the Old Left in ways that made it difficult to perceive exactly where the one ended and the other began.”

Take Weinberg, for example. The first political organization he joined at Berkeley was CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality. CORE was one of the leading civil rights organizations of the 1960s, but it was decidedly a product of the Old Left. Established in the 1940s, its founders included black radicals like James Farmer and Pauli Murray, a Socialist and an ex-Communist (Lovestone

faction), respectively. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the flagship organization of the student New Left, was originally founded as the Student League for Industrial Democracy, the youth section of the League for Industrial Democracy — which, in turn, was founded by Socialist Party activists in 1905 as the Intercollegiate Socialist Society. The place where the Port Huron Statement was adopted, the FDR Four Freedoms Camp, was owned by the Michigan state labor federation. The list goes on. While it would be a mistake to collapse the Old and New Lefts into each other, there was an important degree of continuity across these key generations of the twentieth-century US left.

Generational thinking and analysis can have real value, so long as it is not used to essentialize entire cohorts of people. Of course, it is far more common to see pundits, pontificators, and the very lucrative generational consulting industry do precisely that. We're all familiar with the headlines: "Millennials Are Killing Casual Dining Chains!" "Baby Boomers Don't Care About Climate Change!" Nobody seems to focus on what middle child Generation X thinks, sadly. It all adds up to a mountain of half-baked clichés and stereotypes that do far more to

FIVE BOOKS ON ELDERCARE, HERE AND ABROAD

We asked *Jacobi* contributor Suzanne Gordon to recommend some titles she worked on about the crisis of aging in America.

1



AARON ALTERRA, *THE CAREGIVER: A LIFE WITH ALZHEIMER'S* (1999)

More than 4.5 million Americans suffer from this form of dementia. Guess who gets to take care of them until professional help can be obtained? It's their own middle-aged children or life partners, like Aaron Alterra. He penned this painful memoir of what it's like to be married for 60 years and then be responsible for finding support groups and home day care for a spouse with major memory loss and related personality challenges.

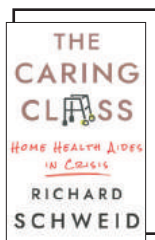
muddy our understanding of what distinguishes generations — and, just as important, what they have in common — than it does to clarify it.

Cohort Effects

Bobby Duffy's *The Generation Myth: Why When You're Born Matters Less Than You Think* is a refreshing exception to the lazy drift of too much generational analysis. Duffy has no time for the simplistic and misleading commentary that often passes for generational analysis in popular discourse. He deftly demonstrates why breathless talk of generational conflict makes us lose sight of the many things that bind the generations together, and he identifies the things that really divide them — namely the “growing economic, housing, and health inequalities” pulling the young and old into separate and unequal worlds. In doing so, he shows us that there is little to be gained by pitting generations against one another. He also sheds light on why so many of my generation, the so-called millennials born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s, were perfectly primed for an interest in socialist politics.

Most generational commentary relies on a simplified and exaggerated version of a concept called “cohort effects.”

2



RICHARD SCHWEID, *THE CARING CLASS: HOME HEALTH AIDES IN CRISIS* (2021)

When caregivers like Aaron Alterra wear out from their 24-hour shifts, the nearly 50 million US families looking after an elderly or disabled person turn to home health aides. In big cities and rural areas, the burden of caregiving then shifts to poor and working-class women with few other job options. In the South Bronx, they are people of color who, as Schweid argues, need better training, pay, and benefits, as well as organizational support from unions.

3



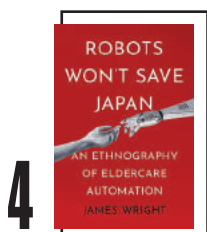
THOMAS EDWARD GASS, *NOBODY'S HOME: CANDID REFLECTIONS OF A NURSING HOME AIDE* (2005)

In America, the ever-increasing financial or emotional cost of caring for the elderly at home leads to their next expensive (or Medicaid-funded) stop: long-term care in an institutionalized setting. The late Tom Gass was a minimum-wage nursing home worker in the Sun Belt. His insider account of what life, death, and work is like for the denizens of for-profit nursing homes is a powerful call for social alternatives to “warehousing of the elderly.”



As Duffy describes it, cohort effects can show how a generation has specific “attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors because they were socialized in different conditions from those of other generations, and thus they remain distinct from other cohorts even as they age.” Analyzing cohort effects can be very useful, but an overreliance on them can easily lead you astray. Like an individual, a cohort may in fact carry certain attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors with them from childhood and adolescence into adulthood. But it’s rare for a generation, like an individual, to stay the same from one decade to the next. I listened to Bloc Party and the Rapture a lot in 2005, but I don’t anymore (I’m forty now, and very predictably “getting into jazz”). Duffy’s book clearly shows how relying solely on cohort effects to analyze generations “misses out on two-thirds of our understanding of societal change.”

Those other two-thirds are “period effects” and “life-cycle effects.” Period effects happen when some sort of major event, especially one that is socially traumatic, affects everyone in the society



4

JAMES ADRIAN WRIGHT, *ROBOTS WON'T SAVE JAPAN: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF ELDERCARE AUTOMATION* (2023)

Faced with a large population of senior citizens (and a related labor shortage), Japan has been toying with a “techno-welfare state” solution. According to Wright, robots will not rescue the nation from its caregiver crisis; instead, it will de-skill and further devalue the work of human beings already on the front line of eldercare — under circumstances better than those of the United States but not as good as Western Europe’s.



5

PAUL V. DUTTON, *BEYOND MEDICINE: WHY EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACIES ENJOY BETTER HEALTH OUTCOMES THAN THE UNITED STATES* (2021)

Dutton argues that Europeans are healthier than Americans because, since the late 19th century, they have created welfare states that make medicine more accessible while improving other social determinants of health, like education, employment, housing, and retirement income. While far from perfect, the social safety nets in France, Germany, and Sweden still provide models worth emulating for the benefit of the one-sixth of the US population over the age of 65.

“We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit.”



Above: Jake MacAvoy, a barista and labor organizer, stands in front of the fourth Starbucks to unionize in Long Island, in Wantagh, New York, September 7, 2022.

Opposite: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez walks the picket line in support of the SAG-AFTRA and WGA strike in New York, New York, July 24, 2023.

and changes attitudes and behaviors in a fairly consistent way. Examples should come easily to mind: the September 11 attacks, or the COVID-19 pandemic. Life-cycle effects are changes that happen as people get older and experience the big events that mark the signposts of life in a society: graduation, leaving home, marriage, children, sickness, and the one that eventually comes for us all, death. If the study of generations is to have any truly useful value, all three of these dimensions — cohort, period, and life-cycle effects — must be brought together into a synthetic analysis. People don't fit into the same clothes as they age, and they tend not to think or do the same things over time, either.

The mode of analysis Duffy sets out in *The Generation Myth* helps us understand why you are holding this very magazine in your hands right now, dear reader. *Jacobin* has been the flagship publication of “millennial socialism,” a phenomenon that began gathering force around 2010, fought its way into the political arena through the 2016 Bernie Sanders presidential campaign, and found sustained expression through the growth of Democratic Socialists of America, the election to office of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the Squad, and campaigns to unionize Starbucks and other leading employers in the neoliberal economy. People born in the late twentieth century experienced a perfect storm of cohort, period, and life-cycle effects that made millennials more open to socialism than any previous generation in American history.

Between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, I lived through a string of events that led me to question many of the predicates of American society: the stolen 2000 presidential election, the 9/11 attacks, the fraudulent invasion of Iraq, the 2008 financial crash, and the deep global recession that followed it. Most of this happened under a Republican president, George W. Bush, who so offensively embodied the right-wing synthesis of God and mammon that millions swore off ever voting GOP. The Iraq War taught us to be critical of the uses of American power in the world, and the Great Recession was so scarring that it discredited capitalist economics.

Amid destroyed jobs and foreclosed mortgages, a generation on the cusp of adulthood had to put its plans for the future on indefinite hiatus. This is what Duffy calls the “delayed adulthood” so many experienced, a result of awful circumstances that members of older generations mistook for immaturity. This is the main thing that set millennials apart from their predecessors, which Duffy rightly attributes to a set of conditions that those predecessors, in most cases, did not have to confront: “extended education, wage stagnation, precarious employment, increased debt, and soaring housing

MASSIVE WEALTH INEQUALITY EXISTS IN EVERY AGE GROUP

The “okay, boomer” discourse made it sound like the elderly were working together as a coherent bloc to steal opportunity from the young. But a study of the 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances by the People’s Policy Project found that wherever you split Americans by age, a nearly identical distribution appears: the top 10% of every age cohort controls around 70% of its wealth, and the bottom 40% owns almost nothing. It’s almost as if class analysis is still vital!

Wealth decile



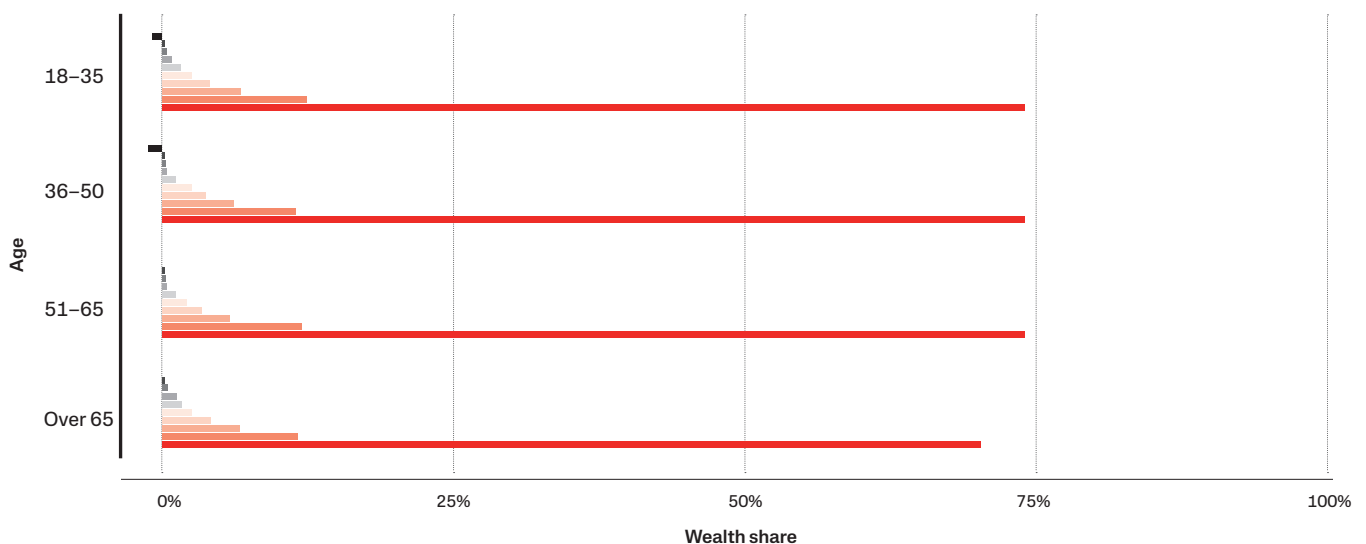
Source: People’s Policy Project

costs.” Plenty of millennials surely blamed themselves for these problems, but others did not. A substantial proportion began to demand a greater degree of collective support and solidarity to live a decent life. When baby boomer Bernie Sanders ran for president in 2016 and 2020, young people flocked to his banner. His coalition was a living refutation of intergenerational warfare, and he dominated among the youngest voters across every conceivable line of difference.

Of course, Sanders is not the president. He may have prevailed among millennials and the rising Generation Z, but the other side of the coin was his unpopularity among voters his own age. They flocked instead to Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden, and they tend to vote in far greater numbers than the under-forty set. The Left’s popularity among the youngest cohorts is a source of hope, but it is no guarantee of future success. Plunged into the midlife maelstrom, millennials may well shed their youthful enthusiasm for socialism as they trade Urban Outfitters for the Old Navy toddler section.

Caveats notwithstanding, millennials do not seem to be inexorably moving toward greater political conservatism.

Wealth Share by Age and Decile (2019)



Voters in their late thirties are notably less conservative than their forebears were at the same age. While events and time may work to pull them rightward, this generation's formative political experiences may have been so intense as to keep them mostly on the left through middle age and into retirement. Generation Z is at least as left-leaning as millennials were at their age, if not more so, and a clear left-right split between voters on either side of forty-five seems to be developing in the electorate.

It would be foolish to declare on this basis that the Left owns the future of American politics. The annals of punditry are littered with false predictions of looming generational majorities for one party or the other. But, contrary to the subtitle of Duffy's excellent book, when you're born might well be an increasingly important dimension of American politics. ■

GENERATION GAPS

According to pop psychologists and journalists throughout the years, different generations might as well be different species.



GREATEST GENERATION (1901–1924)

"The young Americans of this time constituted a generation birthmarked for greatness, a generation of Americans that would take its place in American history with the generations that had converted the North American wilderness into the United States and infused the new nation with self-determination embodied first in the Declaration of Independence and then in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights."
— Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (1998)

LOST GENERATION (1883–1900)

"Remember the cynicism and the hopelessness of Lost Generation I? Its negative, disillusioned flabbiness helped shape the events which led to World War II. There were the boom and the crash, the wild lawless days of prohibition, the shattered hopes of those who believed in 'war to end wars.' There were the decadent literary cults, breadlines, and, finally, futile though well-meaning pacifism."

— Fred M. Hechinger, *Washington Post*, October 6, 1946



SILENT GENERATION (1925–1945)

"The most startling fact about the younger generation is its silence. With some rare exceptions, youth is nowhere near the rostrum. By comparison with the Flaming Youth of their fathers & mothers, today's younger generation is a still, small flame. It does not issue manifestoes, make speeches or carry posters.... Perhaps more than any of its predecessors, this generation wants a good, secure job.... Few youngsters today want to mine diamonds in South Africa, ranch in Paraguay, climb Mount Everest, find a cure for cancer, sail around the world, or build an industrial empire. Some would like to own a small, independent business, but most want a good job with a big firm, and with it, a kind of suburban idyll."

— *TIME*, November 5, 1951

BABY BOOMERS (1946–1964)

"Once the dreary little bastards started getting money in the 1940s, they did an astonishing thing — they took their money and ran. They did something only aristocrats (and intellectuals and artists) were supposed to do — they discovered and started doting on Me! They've created the greatest age of individualism in American history! All rules are broken! The prophets are out of business! Where the Third Great Awakening will lead — who can presume to say? One only knows that the great religious waves have a momentum all their own. Neither arguments nor policies nor acts of the legislature have been any match for them in the past. And this one has the mightiest, holiest roll of all, the beat that goes ... Me ... Me ... Me ... Me ..."

— Tom Wolfe, *New York*, August 23, 1976

GENERATION X (1965–1980)

"The generation of Americans in their 20s sometimes seems to have an image but no impact. They have plenty of cultural signifiers: rave parties, Lollapalooza, the underground Riot Grrrl feminist movement, that annoying guy in the Burger King ads that you just want to slap. But the connections seem to be missing; what does it all add up to?"

— Christopher John Farley, *TIME*, July 19, 1993

MILLENNIALS (1981–1996)

"They embrace the system. They are pragmatic idealists, tinkerers more than dreamers, life hackers. Their world is so flat that they have no leaders, which is why revolutions from Occupy Wall Street to Tahrir Square have even less chance than previous rebellions. They want constant approval — they post photos from the dressing room as they try on clothes. They have massive fear of missing out and have an acronym for everything (including FOMO). They're celebrity obsessed but don't respectfully idolize celebrities from a distance.... They are cool and reserved and not all that passionate. They are informed but inactive: they hate Joseph Kony but aren't going to do anything about Joseph Kony."

— Joel Stein, *TIME*, May 20, 2013

GENERATION Z (1997–2012)

"Generation Z has been called spoiled, overly sensitive, and lazy.... But there is one thing for which they have truly shown a passion: demanding surveillance of other people and accepting the loss of privacy that comes with being constantly watched. Members of Gen Z barely remember a world in which everyone walked around without high-quality phones in their pockets. Not only are they used to the idea of being photographed or recorded at all times, they sometimes demand it. Not churning out a daily supply of TikTok-ready videos is for dullards; the world needs to see you both at your highest points and at your lowest. We have all become streaming versions of ourselves."

— Christian Schneider, *National Review*, June 29, 2023



BY CLAIRE BIDDLES

THE DOOMER CROONER

In his sixties and seventies, the balladeer Scott Walker swerved into making some of the most aggressive, complex, and political music of our time.

IN THEIR TWILIGHT YEARS, SOME MUSICIANS, like Leonard Cohen and Marianne Faithfull, reach a point of artistic closure, achieving a harmony that can be sentimental, profound, or wry. Others, like the pop star turned sonic revolutionary Scott Walker, embrace the “late style” that Edward Said famously defined as “going against,” seeing later life as “an occasion to stir up more anxiety, tamper irrevocably with the possibility of closure, leave the audience more perplexed and unsettled than before.” Walker, who died in 2019, spent his final years writing and recording music that seemingly took up Said’s definition as a personal challenge.

A disillusioned pop idol by his early twenties, Walker shunned the fame he had reluctantly gained during the 1960s as one-third of the Walker Brothers to embark on a metamorphosis unique for a pop act. His four late-1960s solo albums broke sonic and lyrical ground, only to see him retreat into a wasteland of now long out-of-print cover albums in the early 1970s, followed by the reformed Walker Brothers’ 1975 adult contemporary album *No Regrets*. On the cover, Scott tellingly holds his hand up to obscure his face.

But soon Walker kicked off yet another bold artistic shift from luxe orchestral work to deconstructions of rock and pop forms with his contributions to the trio’s 1978 record *Nite Flights*. The dread and anxiety that hummed through those

Scott Walker performs “(Baby) You Don’t Have to Tell Me” with the Walker Brothers on the television show *Ready Steady Go!* in London, England, July 8, 1966.

four tracks, then six years later shot through the center of 1984's *Climate of Hunter* — Walker's first solo album in ten years — finally surfaced in 1995's *Tilt*, triggering a sharp upward curve into the high modernism of his late work.

Much has been made of Walker's output during the long twenty-first century, but he arguably began "going against" in 1969, aged just twenty-six, with the release of his solo albums *Scott 3* and *Scott 4*. Eschewing what Scott superfan and compilation curator Julian Cope referred to as the easy-listening "MOR slop" from his first two solo albums, *Scott 3* and *4* reveal a tendency toward formal abstraction and lyrical enigma. They also represent the start of Walker's expert use of political allegory as "a springboard to another place, to another sort of world" — as with the sweeping, cinematic "The Old Man's Back Again (Dedicated to the Neo-Stalinist Regime)," which tells the story of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia through psychological vignettes like "The crowds just gathered, their faces turned away / And they queue all day like dragons of disgust."



In 2006, political violence on a human scale returned as a key theme for *The Drift*, this time remade with almost dissociative brevity. In “Clara,” the execution of Benito Mussolini’s mistress is presented as body horror delivered by a deadpan mortician (“The breasts are still heavy ... the upper lip remains short”). More often than not, Walker alludes to past atrocities not as a simplistic comparison to the present day but as an intellectual refusal of the complacency of history. For “Buzzers,” the 1995 Srebrenica genocide is depicted through *Disasters of War*-esque viscera (“My second stomach through the trees”) cut through with jarring idioms (“stick the fork in him”) and a passage about the evolution of horses. These jumps between form and subject, set within a dismantled “rock” song, are typical of Walker’s dream (or nightmare) compositional logic.

Musical irony and inappropriate humor are another unsettling force in these late works. “Darkness,” Walker’s astonishing contribution to the *Drift*-era Artangel project *Plague Songs*, imagines the biblical plague of darkness taking place on our “threadbare

A disillusioned pop idol by his early twenties, Walker shunned the fame he had reluctantly gained.



NURSERY RHYMES

The problem of age in the workplace used to tend in the other direction.

“BABIES IN THE MILL”

Dorsey Dixon
1930s

The children all grew up unlearned,
They never went to school.
They never learned to read or write;
They learned to spin and spool.

Every time I close my eyes,
I see that picture still,
When textile work was carried on,
With babies in the mill.

“ROCK-A-BYE BABY”

Anonymous
Early 1900s

Rock-a-bye baby, on the treetop,
When you grow up, you’ll work in a shop;
When you are married, your spouse will work, too,
So that the rich will have nothing to do.

Hush-a-bye baby, on the treetop,
When you grow old, your wages will stop;
When you have spent the little you’ve saved —
Hush-a-bye baby, off to the grave.

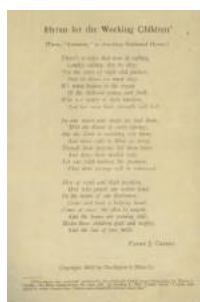
little earth” — except the terror of climate collapse is being egged on by a choir of soul singers (“Gonna heat it up!”). His 2012 album *Bish Bosch* holds heavy tension between irony and inherent seriousness, most notably in the subtitle of its closing track, “The Day the ‘Conductor’ Died (An Xmas Song),” which tells the story of the Christmas Day death of the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu in the form of an absurdist psychological questionnaire. It ends with a twinkling rendition of “Jingle Bells.”

By *Soused*, Walker’s 2014 collaboration with drone metal band Sunn O))), his late work risked becoming a meme — the aging crooner bellowing over dark, avant-garde soundscapes. This is arguably addressed on the album’s opening track, “Brando,” which quotes *The Drift*’s now-infamous meat-punching percussion in order to provocatively transform its politically motivated violence into sadomasochistic flagellation. In the 2010s, just as Walker’s characterization as an enigmatic musical slow coach was firm in the public consciousness, he sped up his working process, with four releases in seven years. Two of these were soundtracks

“LABOR’S DIXIE”

Charles Robinson
1914

Work away down South in the land of cotton;
“Citizen’s Leagues” and all that’s rotten;
Work away, day by day, nary pay, Dixie land;
In Dixie land, the children toil,
And the mothers moil; in Dixie land,
Work away, day by day, nary pay, down South
in Dixie.



“HYMN FOR THE WORKING CHILDREN”

Fanny J. Crosby
1913

There’s a voice that now is calling,
Loudly calling, day by day;
’Tis the voice of right and justice,
And its tones we must obey.

We must hasten to the rescue
Of the children young and frail,
Who are weary of their burdens,
And too soon their strength will fail.

Ironically, he always intended to sound straightforward, unadorned, “just a man singing.”

for the young filmmaker Brady Corbet, whose work shares many of Walker’s sensibilities. In his final act of “going against,” Walker’s last release, his contribution to Corbet’s *Vox Lux* soundtrack, was entirely absent of his voice — the only constant through his six-decade career.

Walker’s late work could be compared to a monolith: huge, impenetrable, baffling. Ironically, he always intended to sound straightforward, unadorned, “just a man singing.” In his collected lyrics book, *Sundog*, published one year before he died in 2019, unreleased and unfinished lyrics are presented as a coda. His fans would never get to experience the fullness of what these fragments promised — they had already heard everything he would ever make.

But what if they’re wrong? What if they haven’t heard *The Drift* or *Soused* or “Darkness” properly yet? In the decades to come, will audiences paradoxically settle into the open-endedness of the works that came after? Will they experience their own “going against” — an understanding of not the works themselves but the daring late state of mind that allowed them to form? ■



“WE WILL SING ONE SONG”

Joe Hill
1913

We will sing one song of the
children in the mills,
They’re taken from playgrounds
and schools,
In tender years made to go the
pace that kills,
In the sweatshops, ‘mong the
looms and the spools.



“THE SHADOW CHILD”

Harriet Monroe
1908

Why do I pick the threads all day,
Mother, mother,
While sunshine children are at play?
And must I work forever?

Yes, shadow-child; the livelong day,
Daughter, little daughter,
Your hands must pick the threads away
And feel the sunshine never.

BY EILEEN JONES

THE LOST MATRIARCHS OF HOLLYWOOD

American cinema was once full of formidable, charismatic older women. What happened to them?

PERHAPS THE MOST FORMIDABLE WOMAN of classic Hollywood was the strong, eagle-eyed matriarch. She's generally missing from screens now, but from the 1930s till the 1960s, certain character actors — Lucile Watson, Edna May Oliver, May Robson, Jane Darwell, and Gladys Cooper, among others — put their unique signatures on these roles.

Ethel Barrymore brought her commanding height, hawklike profile, and legendary stage eminence to bear on a late-in-life film career that consisted almost entirely of powerful, no-nonsense matriarchs up and down the class scale. She played the rich head of a politically powerful dynasty in 1947's *The Farmer's Daughter*, the regal, sagacious aunt in an idealized middle-class family in 1954's *Young at Heart*, and the impoverished, slum-dwelling, and cancer-suffering but still iron-willed mother of a rebellious Cockney son in 1944's *None but the Lonely Heart*.

All these actors were of Anglo-American Victorian vintage, born in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. This was a time when patriarchal power was so oppressive that it catalyzed a longing for a quasi-mythical matriarchy. The revered character of wise and stalwart Marmee in *Little Women* is a good

illustration of this phenomenon, which found its way readily into popular fiction, theater, and films.

That's not to say women had *no* actual power in society, even when consigned to the domestic sphere. The stature amassed by upper-class women of a certain age is one of the focal points of Clare Boothe Luce's 1936 satirical hit play *The Women*. In the 1939 film adaptation, Lucile Watson played the imposing matriarch as a wise old owl — she's literally pictured that way in the opening credits, which intercut the all-female cast members with shots of animals resembling their characters. Watson's perpetually calm, worldly advice stands in contrast to that of her daughter's flighty, spiteful, meddling friends, and it relies on bedrock experience, including her own late husband's affair many years earlier: "My dear, this story isn't new. It comes to most women."

The formidable matriarch ranged freely among various genres and was equally at home in comedy and drama. May Robson adapted this character to the screwball comedy subgenre in 1938's *Bringing Up Baby*, in which everyone is trying to curry favor with her wealthy, autocratic Mrs Carlton Random, aka Aunt Elizabeth, though there's so much leopard-chasing chaos whirling around that no one has time to listen to her. She catches the spirit of the chase without loss of dignity when she's asked if she'd like to run too, like everyone else: "Yes, let's," she says decidedly, and trots off arm in arm with her elderly gentleman friend.

Jane Darwell is the most memorable of the working-class matriarchs in her heartbreaking



The acclaimed actress Ethel Barrymore is pictured with jars of "Ethel Blue," a beauty cream she sold on the side. "It is called a 'business venture,'" she once snarked to an interviewer.

ONE LAST JOB

Many great directors lose their fastballs. But a few legends have managed to buck that trend, turning in some of their best work in their twilight years.



Oscar-winning performance as the fierce but caring Ma Joad, occupying the stable center of her immiserated Okie family in 1940's *The Grapes of Wrath*. It's startling now to look back on some of these films, as the "formidable matriarch" rested on an assumption that, by age fifty, a woman had probably amassed enough experience and authority and — possibly — property to impress and even daunt everyone else. In these movies, there's no suggestion that the aging woman is virtually unseen in society, as a recent, much-discussed *Atlantic* article, "The Invisibility of Older Women," claims.

In old Hollywood movies, the case is quite the contrary — the old woman is very often a remarkable, and sometimes even a dreaded, force to be reckoned with. No one forgets her. She's not silly. She's not pitiful. She's not desperate to look younger or hold on to her youthful sexuality. Nor is she mentally fading in a struggle with dementia or Alzheimer's disease, as we've seen dramatized in a number of films in the last two decades, such as *The Notebook* (2004), *Away From Her* (2006), *Still Alice* (2014), *What They Had* (2018), and *Elizabeth Is Missing* (2019). In short,

AKIRA KUROSAWA AT 75 *RAN* (1985)

It's hard to believe it now, but in the 1970s, the acclaimed master director of films like *Seven Samurai*, *Throne of Blood*, *Ikiru*, *Yojimbo*, and *High and Low* was facing the end of his career. Unable to secure financing and in poor health, he attempted suicide in 1971 at the age of 61. But after the success of *Star Wars* in 1977, George Lucas sought out a meeting with the nearly 70-year-old Kurosawa. Lucas used his newfound clout with 20th Century Fox to get Kurosawa's *Kagemusha* (1980), a visual and thematic trial run for *Ran*, produced. After *Kagemusha*'s success, Kurosawa finally got to make *Ran*, a beautiful and apocalyptic retelling of William Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

STANLEY KUBRICK AT 70 *EYES WIDE SHUT* (1999)

As much of a "sex movie" as *The Shining* was a "haunted house movie," this strange, haunting film was overshadowed at the time by rumors concerning on-set turmoil (a 400-day shoot, Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise's marriage, Harvey Keitel's sudden and mysterious exit from the production) as well as the supposedly shocking sexual content and Kubrick's death shortly before its release. And yet the result is a dream-logic parable about marriage and fidelity — albeit with a disturbing undercurrent involving the twisted sexuality of our ruling class. Its reputation has only improved, thanks to the online speculation about Jeffrey Epstein's life and death.

she's got — and more than retains — her power as she ages. So where did she go?

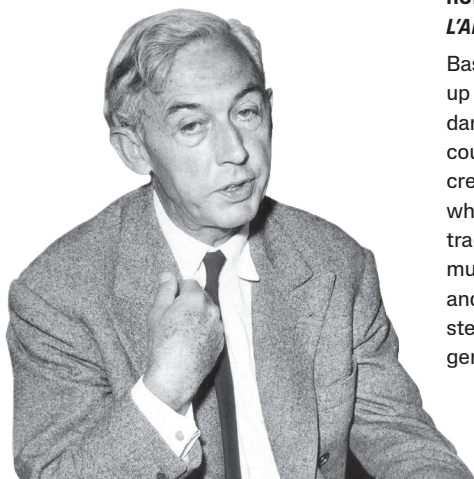
It seems like a good time to ask: When was the last time you saw the formidable matriarch in a film or TV series? If someone's playing the queen of England, for example — any queen between Elizabeth I and Elizabeth II — you might see a version of her; or, interestingly, if you see a film drama involving a black mother of grown children, especially men. Viola Davis in the 2023 film *Air* is a good example of the black mother as formidable matriarch, the undisputed head of her household by right of superior shrewdness, fearsome strength, and unshakable will. The comedic variation, currently most familiar in Tyler Perry's films built around the character of Madea, beginning with 2005's *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, is frequently regarded as rooted in a denigrating black stereotype most definitively portrayed in the long-running radio sitcom *Amos 'n' Andy*, with the domineering, emasculating Sapphire. That character, in turn, was derived from the "sassy Mammy" comic characters of the nineteenth century. Her role is to "take down" the more threatening target in the view of white audiences — the black male — through the perpetual castigation of laziness, venality, and stupidity.

The character of the formidable matriarch once ranged freely among various genres and was equally at home in comedy and drama.

A still of the prolific actress Jane Darwell from *McFadden's Flats* (1927), a working-class comedy directed by Ralph Murphy.

MARTIN SCORSESE AT 76 *THE IRISHMAN* (2019)

Sure, the computer-generated de-aging looks fake, but who cares? This story about Jimmy Hoffa's possible assassin is really an ode to the postwar prosperity of the average working stiff made possible by the Teamsters, and all the sharp elbows they might have thrown to ensure that prosperity. The film makes a good case that America has always been best understood as a semicriminal enterprise.



ROBERT BRESSON AT 82 *L'ARGENT* (1983)

Based on a Leo Tolstoy short story, *L'Argent* dials up Bresson's Catholic anti-modernism to 11 with his darkest work. Affluent young French kids make counterfeit money for kicks, only for the bill they created to doom a young working-class man, whose life descends into a cascading series of tragedies, ending with his transformation into a murderer. Capitalism rots the souls of the affluent and turns those on the losing end into monsters — cheery stuff, courtesy of an octogenarian genius who didn't like where the world was headed.



If, as in the Victorian era, the matriarch emerges as a kind of beloved fantasy figure when women's power is perceived as particularly weak, then her absence today might make some sense. Certainly such representations faded out during the rise of the women's liberation movement in the late 1960s. But she wasn't replaced with anything too imposing.

There are a surprising number of female actors over fifty getting major roles in Hollywood films: Helen Mirren, Judi Dench, Meryl Streep, Michelle Yeoh, Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin, Kathy Bates, Frances McDormand, Viola Davis, Nicole Kidman, Patricia Arquette, Laura Dern, and others. But they don't slot regularly into a socially accepted character type that denotes power. Even if they're playing queens, or major political figures, or celebrities protecting their hard-earned stardom, or fashion mavens, or business executives, or fiercely protective mothers, the emphasis is often placed on how vulnerable, troubled, and self-doubting they are behind the impressive front. In short, once you've seen the matriarch of the classic cinema, it's hard not to miss her. ■

SIDNEY LUMET AT 83

BEFORE THE DEVIL KNOWS YOU'RE DEAD (2007)

Along with his excellent *Find Me Guilty*, from only one year prior, legendary director Sidney Lumet (*Serpico*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, *Network*) refused to go gently into that good night and directed two excellent, punchy films nearly halfway into his ninth decade. While *Find Me Guilty* has a resigned, melancholic humor, *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* is a nasty piece of work, bringing Lumet back to his noir heyday.



WILLIAM FRIEDKIN AT 76

KILLER JOE (2011)

Recently departed filmmaking legend William Friedkin (*The Exorcist*, *Sorcerer*, *The French Connection*) arguably kicked off the "McConaissance" with this adaptation of Tracy Letts's darkly comedic play about a young Texas drug dealer hiring a detective moonlighting as a hit man (played by Matthew McConaughey) to murder his stepmother. It's great, seedy stuff, and a surprising late-career turn from the legendary Billy Friedkin, may he rest in peace.

OUR AGING STARS

This last year, the National Research Group asked the public, “Who do you most want to watch in a theater?” People’s answers suggest that the last 15 years of Hollywood filmmaking have hardly made a dent in the public consciousness — those who ruled the box office in the ‘90s and 2000s are, with only a couple exceptions, the only ones who matter today. And that when it comes to movie stars, 58 — the average age of the top 20 — is the new 40.



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- CHRIS HEMSWORTH
- KEVIN HART
- RYAN REYNOLDS
- ANGELINA JOLIE
- LEONARDO DICAPRIO
- DWAYNE JOHNSON
- JULIA ROBERTS
- WILL SMITH
- ADAM SANDLER
- ROBERT DOWNEY JR
- BRAD PITT
- KEANU REEVES
- SANDRA BULLOCK
- JOHNNY DEPP
- TOM CRUISE
- GEORGE CLOONEY
- TOM HANKS
- DENZEL WASHINGTON
- HARRISON FORD
- MORGAN FREEMAN



THE SHAH-MAZING CASE

**The drama at the heart of the
strangest season of *Real
Housewives* was ... elder fraud?**

After two seasons of drama, *The Real Housewives of Salt Lake City* spiced things up with an on-screen criminal investigation. In March 2021, Jennifer Shah, the wife of a prominent University of Utah football coach, was arrested, indicted, and arraigned on charges of conspiracy to commit wire fraud via telemarketing and conspiracy to commit money laundering. She was a housewife by day, but by night she was a major



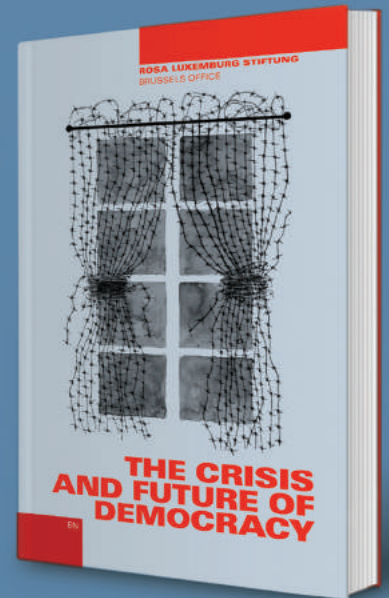
player in a nationwide scheme to identify elderly people vulnerable to the sale of “business services,” who would subsequently be defrauded until their bank accounts were empty.

“I invested more than half of the savings I had for retirement,” one victim told ABC. “I gave them directly about \$47,000.” Other victims (mostly 55-plus) described falling behind on bills, facing eviction, and declaring bankruptcy.

Shah, who pleaded guilty after months of adamant denial — her tagline for season two of *The Real Housewives of Salt Lake City* was “The only thing I’m guilty of is being Shah-mazing!” — is currently serving five and a half years at Federal Prison Camp, Bryan, for her participation in the fraud; she also had to forfeit \$6.5 million and 108 luxury items (78 of which were counterfeit) and pay an additional \$6.6 million in restitution. According to her manager, she is in the midst of producing a play called “The Real Housewives of Bryan” with her fellow inmates and leading weekly abs, Pilates, and high-intensity interval training (HIIT) workout classes. ■

The stars of the second season of *The Real Housewives of Salt Lake City* pose, with Jennifer Shah third from the right.

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prospects
for radical
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KATE MACINTOSH'S GENTLE BRUTALISM

BY OWEN HATHERLEY

THERE ARE TWO PUBLIC HOUSING SCHEMES in South London designed by the architect Kate Macintosh, both of which are still much admired to this day. One, Dawson's Heights, is gigantic and unmissable — an immense brick castle on a hill, inspired by Macintosh's native Edinburgh. She designed it in 1965, at the age of twenty-eight, for the London Borough of Southwark. The other, at 269 Leigham Court Road, is a tiny, secluded estate of interconnected houses built specifically for older tenants. She designed it in 1968, after moving to the adjacent borough of Lambeth.

These are two of the most loved examples of 1960s architecture in Britain. But the programs that made them a reality are now extinct. Nobody builds enormous social housing ziggurats like Dawson's Heights today, despite London's acute housing crisis. But Leigham Court Road's ideals are perhaps even more distant — the provision of excellent, publicly funded, communal housing intended for the elderly.

Leigham Court Road is one of several examples across Britain of public housing designed for the elderly and the vulnerable, also known as sheltered housing. In the '60s, housing for older people was only just starting to escape the rigors of Victorian philanthropy. When designing it, Macintosh tells me, "the most important thing for me was for it not to look institutional." She



In 1960s London, the architect Kate Macintosh designed great modernist housing for the elderly, still beloved by its residents — but how long can it survive?

A 1973 view of Dawson's Heights from Overhill Road, to the east.



doesn't choose the word by accident—the other sheltered housing schemes she'd seen in Lambeth were, she remembers, “absolutely horrific—converted workhouses run in military fashion.” Because of this, she was “determined not to have a corridor” in the development.

And while it *looks* completely different from Dawson Heights, two shared principles are found in both designs: “the individual expression of each dwelling,” so that people could always see which part of the building was theirs, and a “maximum respect for trees.” So, at Leigham Court Road, each resident has their own front door, alongside communal facilities like a laundry, a guest suite for visiting family and friends, and a live-in warden, all wrapped around a garden. The site, in Streatham, was in a leafy area of big houses a couple miles from more bustling areas like Brixton, which made it “rather suburban,” she remembers. But this had one major advantage. The development was built on the site of “a substantial Edwardian mansion,” which Lambeth had bought. That house was soon demolished, but its gardens were retained, and with them several large, mature trees. “Not a single tree was taken down,” Macintosh says proudly, having designed the facilities around them in an irregular arrangement.

At the time, Lambeth's housing was under the direction of Ted Hollamby, a card-carrying Communist who aimed to produce such a large amount of public housing that there would be a surplus, meaning there would never be any means testing, and people could live their entire lives in public housing, moving and swapping between developments as their circumstances changed.

Not long after Leigham Court Road was completed, Macintosh moved out of London and began working for local authorities in South East England. Her last



Dawson's Heights viewed from the north, on Dog Kennel Hill.





Dawson's Heights in the evening.



building before retiring was the Weston Adventure Playground, in the port city of Southampton, built in 2005. If she had designed housing for the elderly in her twenties, in her seventies, Macintosh was designing for children — “a lovely thing to do at the end of one’s career,” she says now. The same principles of respect for both nature and the building’s users, without sentimentality or affectation, can be seen in that late work. Weston is dominated by a massive 1960s public housing estate very different from the ones Macintosh designed at the time, a series of gigantic towers overlooking the estuary. The playground was tucked in at the back of these and is secluded behind trees rather than exposed to water, but its main building is elevated to enjoy the “stupendous panoramic view” over the Solent strait.

After she retired, Macintosh’s work was rediscovered by a new generation. Both Dawson’s Heights and Leigham Court Road appear regularly on “I Heart Brutalism” Instagram accounts for their drama and abstraction. Leigham Court was listed as a historic, protected building in 2015, partly due to lobbying by its residents, who also suggested renaming it Macintosh Court. Ironically, this began a struggle that Macintosh has immersed herself in since her retirement. Lambeth Council had been planning to sell 269 Leigham Court Road, which would then likely have been demolished. After it was listed as historic, a disastrous renovation in 2017 saw the houses beset with leaks and flooding. Lambeth Council was forced to apologize and provide a financial settlement to residents, but recent works redressing these issues have also been heavily criticized for distorting the architecture with a new network of pipes surrounding the cubic houses. Macintosh tells me some residents fear this saga is intended to alter the buildings so much that the



A typical cluster block of eight flats in Macintosh Court, demonstrating how tenants use their terraces and patios.

historic status will be removed, meaning the buildings can be demolished and the land sold.

She attributes all this to the ways Thatcherism, outsourcing, and austerity have ground down local councils' expertise, until there is nobody left with the competence and the budget to carry out anything like the ambitious schemes that councils like Lambeth embarked upon in the 1960s and '70s. What public housing has been replaced with, she says, is "asset-based welfare," in which the elderly are encouraged to own property — "the only security a lot of older people have" in places like Lambeth — and live off it in order to supplement their meager state pension.

In the process, younger renters have been left at the mercy of private landlords, and a generationally divided housing system has emerged in place of the model Hollamby imagined, where council housing could provide for people from cradle to grave. But 269 Leigham Court Road still shows the power of an alternative in which, rather than being shunted into privately run care homes or empty houses, people could grow old communally. ■

Nobody builds enormous social housing ziggurats like Dawson's Heights today, despite London's acute housing crisis.

COMPANY TOWNS

There is money to be made in end-of-life amusements for wealthy retirees.

LAKE WEIR LIVING

Location: Ocklawaha, Florida

Size: 400 acres **Homes:** 300

Slogan: "Live Where You Ride"

Description: Lake Weir Living is a retirement community dedicated to "toy" lovers: elderly people who can't quite give up their motorcycles, RVs, boats, cars, and other vehicles.



Above: The Beach Boys perform onstage at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center in the Villages, Florida, February 28, 2022.

Opposite: Retirees Steve and Sharon McDonald walk through the Latitude Margaritaville Watersound community in Panama City Beach, Florida, October, 7, 2021.

THE VILLAGES

Location: Sumter County, Florida; Marion County, Florida

Size: 51,200 acres **Homes:** 71,000

Slogan: "Free Golf for Life"

Description: A sprawling 55-plus community infamous for its active residents, living a freewheeling lifestyle in what is — according to popular legend — the "STD capital of America."

SPRUCE CREEK FLY-IN COMMUNITY

Location: Port Orange, Florida

Size: 1,600 acres **Homes:** 1,300

Slogan: "Live, Work, and Play in the Same Spot"

Description: Spruce Creek appeals to elderly aviation hobbyists, who can purchase property with private hangars and access to an on-site 4,000-foot lighted runway.

LASELL VILLAGE

Location: Newton, Massachusetts

Size: 13 acres

Population: 225

Slogan: "Live Where Lifelong Learning Means Something Different"

Description: Lasell Village (one of about 60 college retirement communities in the US) adjoins Lasell University, at which residents are expected to take 450 hours' worth of courses annually.

MV ENCHANTED EXPLORER

Location: Worldwide

Size: 590 feet long

Capacity: 836 passengers

Slogan: "Really Taking You Places"

Description: Pre-pandemic, Cruise Retirement Ltd was offering older explorers 20-year leases on cabins aboard the MV *Explorer*, a ship that formerly played host to Semester at Sea.



LATITUDE MARGARITAVILLE

Location: Daytona Beach, Florida; Watersound, Florida; Hilton Head, North Carolina

Size: 8,820+ acres **Homes:** 10,400

Slogan: "Growing Older but Not Up"

Description: Named for the eponymous Jimmy Buffett song, this Jimmy-Buffett-themed chain of three communities is home to residents who share two interests: golf and liquor.

The Empire Calls Back

BY ALEXANDER ZAITCHIK

India's phone scam industry
targets the elderly to the tune of billions
each year. Its secret weapon?
The loss of communal public life
and family support.



THE FINANCIAL BARRIER to starting an Indian “call center” is not very high. For \$15,000, an experienced franchiser can help you find a suitable floor in a black-glass office building, wire it with dozens of computer stations, and train a fleet of ambitious, English-speaking graduates to perform telecom fraud. You can usually recoup your investment within a month or two.

Revenues flow in dollars, payroll and other expenses in rupees. The local police will be a nuisance-level operating cost at worst, with the risk of arrest — never mind prosecution — vanishingly slight. Paranoia can be managed by remembering the name of Samarth Bansal, who penned an exhaustive *Hindustan Times* exposé of Delhi-area scam centers, only to receive a single text message in response: a thumbs-up emoji from a colleague.

More than a decade into India’s rise as a phone scam superpower, fraudulent call centers still thrive across the subcontinent. Scamming is now a mature industry whose growth, like food and alcohol delivery, exploded exponentially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, India-based scam syndicates defrauded Americans out of more than \$10 billion. More than \$3 billion of that was siphoned from the accounts of ninety thousand Americans aged sixty and older. This is a sixfold increase from the \$500 million seniors lost to scammers in 2021, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Internet Crime Complaint Center — the fastest growth of any age group. But even these numbers may be lowball estimates. Authorities admit they’re scrambling just to keep up with the most elusive and fast-evolving adversary in international crime.

The pandemic-era explosion in telefraud led to the dawn of a new era of international cooperation between US and Indian law enforcement. In 2020, the FBI opened a permanent office inside the American embassy in New Delhi. This partnership was key to the neutralization, in June 2023, of a scam run out of the western Indian city of Ahmedabad. The arrest of its twenty-nine-year-old ringleader, Vatsal Mehta, and his top deputies was the culmination of a five-year joint operation of the FBI, US INTERPOL, and “special units” of the Indian national police.

For the better part of a decade, Mehta’s agents bilked American seniors for millions of dollars using robocalls that impersonated the voices of government officials. When victims returned the call at the number provided, operators informed them that their Social Security numbers had been involved in a serious crime. To avoid arrest,

they would have to settle a fine immediately — payable by bank transfer, crypto, or credit card. If needed, Mehta’s US-based employees were dispatched to the victim’s home to collect cash or gift cards from a local Walgreens.

Mehta’s favorite script called for his agents to impersonate Uttam Dhillon, the acting administrator of the Drug Enforcement Agency. It’s a fair guess that the ramrod-straight career prosecutor took the use of his name personally. In a bureaucratic reshuffle that may have sealed Mehta’s fate, Dhillon was transferred across town to direct INTERPOL’s Washington bureau in the spring of 2021. At the time, the organization was still riding high on breaking up the syndicate believed to have pioneered the government-official impersonation scam. The previous December, a federal judge in Texas sentenced the forty-four-year-old Indian national Hitesh Madhubhai Patel to twenty years in prison, topped with a \$9 million restitution order, on charges of identification fraud, wire fraud conspiracy, access device fraud, money laundering, and impersonating a federal officer. Twenty-four of Patel’s US-based agents and footmen received similar sentences in Texas, Arizona, and Georgia.

The Patel and Mehta busts proved that even the most sophisticated scam operators could be tracked, caught, and prosecuted. But neither came close to slaying the hydra that Indian telefraud has become. Law enforcement is outnumbered and outmatched, limited to symbolic shows of justice like the masked perp walks favored by Indian police. Confronted with this massive asymmetry, other federal agencies have been forced to step in. In April, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) launched Project Point of No Entry, which targets Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) service providers that enable cheap international robocalls over the internet. Working with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and state attorneys general, the FTC now has a team dedicated to sending cease and desist letters to US-based VoIP companies. But even on this front, the government is playing a dizzying game of digital Whac-A-Mole. Robocalls can simply be routed from other countries. Unchecked data harvesting has produced countless call lists that are sold by a proliferating number of legal data brokers and at least as many on the dark web.

The best defense against scammers may turn out to be the oldest: awareness and education. If so, the most important group in protecting the elderly isn’t the FBI, INTERPOL, or the FTC, but the American Association of Retired Persons.

In 2022, scammers targeting seniors absconded with an average of \$35,000 per victim.

WHEN ETHEL PERCY ANDRUS founded the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) in 1958, the retired schoolteacher had elder fraud squarely in her sights. The scams of the last century may appear quaint today, but they aggravated the financial vulnerability of millions of American seniors. Their persistence outraged Andrus, a lifelong reformer who cut her teeth working with new immigrants at Jane Addams's Hull House. Even in America's new "age of affluence," the timeless "medicine man" stalked the country unimpeded, with little regulation targeting advertisements for quack cure-alls that promised to eradicate the ills and pains of aging. Among AARP's first legislative accomplishments was stronger Food and Drug Administration oversight of medicine sales and advertising.

Unlike medicine fraud, the origins of the second most common scam targeting seniors could be traced back to one of the American left's greatest achievements: the passage of the Social Security Act of 1935. Early Social Security scams took on various forms, including a primitive version of today's agency-official impersonation scam. But the dominant swindle was simple theft and forgery. By 1963, the year of Andrus's star turn as lead witness during congressional hearings on "Frauds and Quackery Affecting the Older Citizen," the Treasury Department estimated that one-third of the fifty thousand forged checks reported every year were Social Security benefit checks.

"Nothing could be more invidious than the pressures that plague older persons and further deplete their reduced incomes," Andrus told the Senate Special Committee on Aging. She proposed a national education

campaign led by AARP and a national service corps to "prevent or expose any practice or activity ... contrary to the Nation's concern for its elderly citizens."

The national service corps never materialized, but AARP pushed forward in its mission. Sixty years later, scam awareness is central to the organization's work. It operates the Fraud Watch Network, runs a toll-free scam helpline, and publishes running updates on how to identify the latest scams. But today these crimes are fundamentally different in kind and in scale than the ones Andrus crusaded against, having evolved into a full-fledged industry in ways we are just beginning to appreciate. As recently as 2017, David Graeber maintained in *Bullshit Jobs* that cons and scams should be considered "an act, not a profession," because no one is paying scammers "wages or a salary." This ignored the professionalization of scamming that occurred in India throughout the 2010s, where "call centers" competed for recruits by offering base salaries and juicy commissions, similar to any other sales job.

Another departure from the scams of the past is the sheer volume of funds being stolen, individually and in aggregate. In 2022, scammers targeting seniors absconded with an average of \$35,000 per victim, according to the FBI. It's an absolutely crushing amount, especially for seniors, more than 90 percent of whom rely on Social Security to supplement their savings — if they have any. The modern scam results in situations far worse than a lost Social Security check — it sends previously comfortable retirements into poverty overnight. Pricy cancer treatments can no longer be paid for. Caretakers are let go. Family homes are sold. Suicides are reported.

It is often assumed that seniors are targeted because they are easily confused or suffering some form of cognitive decline. But the research doesn't support this. The most important risk indicators, according to the data, are social isolation and loneliness. When people are lonely and lacking daily human connections, they are more likely to stay on the phone and talk to strangers. Living alone also deprives people of second opinions. A University of Southern California study found that seniors with "loneliness and social dissatisfaction" reported greater "financial exploitation vulnerability." The fact that these risk factors are steadily afflicting more and younger Americans is almost certainly driving growing scam numbers. One-quarter of Americans aged sixty-five or older meet the criteria for "chronic social isolation"; one-third of adults over the age of forty-five report feeling "loneliness."

The connection between vulnerability and loneliness was a running feature of the 1963 hearings on fraud

convened by the Senate Special Committee on Aging. In one of the sadder examples from the proceedings, a scam was detailed in which seniors were conned into paying in advance for dancing lessons that did not in fact exist. "In a desire for companionship and a possible substitution for the loneliness which frequently accompanies old age, these elder citizens are deluded into the belief that by taking dancing lessons and becoming a regular attendant of classes, they will be able to have an antidote for their cloistered existence," noted Paul Rand Dixon, then chair of the FTC.

The salience of isolation is well understood by modern scammers, who are after far more than the price of dancing classes. The Indian journalist Snigdha Poonam heard as much during her own investigation. "America is full of old people who live alone," said a young female scammer in the tech hub of Gurugram. "They have no one to turn to."

THE CALL CENTER, like the telephone, is native to the United States. It took its modern form during the 1960s and enjoyed a golden age that lasted roughly three decades. Starting in the mid-1990s, American companies began sending customer support jobs abroad, a back-office corollary to the offshoring of factory jobs to Mexico and China. Call center offshoring accelerated with the post-9/11 economic downturn, as most major banks, airlines, and phone companies moved customer support desks to India, home to a labor surplus bursting with college graduates who had been studying English since the third grade. In rapidly growing hubs near Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai, young Indians earned a fraction of the starting salary commanded in the States. Tech companies, meanwhile, also turned their attention to the subcontinent, where they could now hire programming and technical support staff fluent in Java for a mere

\$5,000 a year — \$60,000 less than a similarly trained American.

By the mid-aughts, 90 percent of major US firms no longer regarded outsourcing as a cost-saving measure but rather as a central component of their businesses. A new anglophone consulting industry emerged to assist American and British companies making the move. For every one thousand customer service jobs they sent to India, according to the International Association of Outsourcing Professionals, they could expect to save \$20 million.

The boom times did not last long. A few years after arriving, many large US firms abandoned the newly built office towers of Kolkata and Gurugram for greener pastures further east. By 2011, the Philippines had joined India in the elite ranks of call center destinations; some four hundred thousand customer service workers were answering calls for Expedia, JPMorgan Chase, and AT&T

in office parks outside Manila. Around the same time, other firms subcontracted their customer support operations to US prisons, lured by the siren song of UNICOR, a US government corporation, to imagine “all the benefits of domestic outsourcing at offshore prices.”

As India’s call center industry contracted, its software development and IT support industries were supercharged by the continued offshoring of a mushrooming US tech sector, a labor shift symbolized by Microsoft’s decision in 2010 to subcontract all of its help desk and application support services to the Bangalore-based Infosys Limited. However, in an echo of America’s own globalization-induced labor crises, Indians who worked in the old call center jobs were not necessarily qualified for the new IT jobs. What any young English-speaking Indian graduate *could* do, however, was *pretend* to work for the tech giants that arrived in India just as the banks and the airlines were leaving.

The number of calls from fraudulent staffers representing Microsoft, Apple, Norton, and Amazon grew steadily over the 2010s, dramatically spiking at the start of the pandemic. In 2022, tech support fraud was the most common scam across all age groups, with seniors disproportionately affected. And 95 percent of the calls came from India.

All the elements required for the emergence of the tech support scam — the backbone of the larger scam industry — were in place by the early 2010s: real estate, expertise in running call centers, heightened income expectations of young college-educated Indians, and experience in navigating the psychological terrain of American seniors struggling with social isolation and technology overload. That this experience was often

hard-earned likely helped at least some former call center employees to rationalize their transition into professional scammers. Beginning in the late ’90s, conversations with Indian operators presented a convenient outlet for the rage and confusion of Americans impacted by accelerating globalization. A *TIME* story from 2007 described the torrents of abuse routinely absorbed by Indian operators, including the antics of a Philadelphia radio host who phoned India-based customer service reps for the sole purpose of calling them “dirty rat eaters” live on-air.

Deeper resentments may also hover over the Indian scam industry. One of its capitals, Kolkata, earlier served as the headquarters of another global scam that was larger, more vicious, and more lucrative by an order of magnitude: the East India Company. Beginning in the 1750s, the company, with the funds and blessings of the British crown, systematically siphoned the wealth of Bengal, and eventually the rest of the country, to create unprecedented fortunes for “a few traders, who have not yet learned to wash their bottoms,” in the words of an Indian contemporary. When reports of enforced mass starvation and violent plunder reached Europe, satirists mocked company directors as “Lord Vultures” — “a troop of desperate banditti ... a scandalous confederacy to plunder and strip.”

Today a debate rages in India over the damage the scam industry is doing to the country’s name, with a misdirected aggrievement over India’s colonization visible at the margins. Beneath a *Times of India* report on call center scams, the top commentator urged “Indian cheats” to “focus their attention on the UK, as it is the UK that looted trillions of dollars from India. Even now they have set up tax havens and are giving refuge to all people who fled India with looted money.”

India’s scam industry
is “the largest cross-cultural
communication ever
to take place.”

AS WITH THE OUTSOURCING WAVE that preceded it, the Indian scam sector has now spawned secondary industries in its wake. Workers at internet security providers owe their jobs to the mass anxiety created by these scams, as do staffers at the ballooning anti-fraud divisions within tech giants and federal agencies.

But the most lucrative second-order profession is a new breed of YouTube celebrity who makes entertainment from online vigilante justice: the scambaiter. Usually sponsored by VPN providers and internet security companies, top scambaiters rack up hundreds of thousands and even millions of views. Voice altering programs allow them to impersonate confused old ladies, only to then turn the tables against unwitting scammers. Sometimes the purpose is to exasperate or interrogate; sometimes it's to drain the scammers' *own* accounts in sophisticated and ingenious acts of reverse fraud. If you can't rid the world of scammers, you can at least drink their tears.

The breakout star of the bunch is the Los Angeles-based duo of Ashton Bingham and Art Kulik. Under the name Trilogy Media, Bingham and Kulik have perfected an aesthetic resembling the love child of MrBeast and the Jerky Boys. Last summer, they teamed up with fellow scambaiters Mark Rober and Jim Browning to organize the audacious infiltration of a sprawling Kolkata-based scam operation. Using Indian agents, the YouTube A-team unleashed cockroaches, timer-detonated stink bombs, and glitter grenades on the call center floor, disrupting its operation for days. Videos of the high jinks racked up hundreds of millions of views.

But as popular as the videos are, they rarely result in anything more than a brief nuisance. "We love to waste the scammers' time," said Bingham in a video Q&A with *Wired*. "The more time they're on the phone with us, the less time they're on the phone with your grandmother." Even when the videos create enough heat to force raids by Indian police, the result is often a catch and release following a Mexican-style perp walk and pony show.

Jim Browning had bigger hopes when he started his scambaiting channel in 2013. Considered the "godfather" of scambaiting, Browning is the YouTube name of an Irish technologist who specializes in cracking into the closed-circuit television (CCTV) systems of call centers, then showing the feeds to the world. "I thought, if I keep recording like this, maybe the authorities can do

something about it," he says. "I was very wrong about that." He describes India as a safe haven for a scam industry that has managed to stay one step ahead of the authorities, in a kind of Darwinian adaptation. With reduced expectations about the impacts, he now scam-baits full-time, which he describes as the "art of taking scammers off their scripts and turning the tables."

Whether the steady flow of intel and evidence gathered by the scambaiters — locations of scam centers, CCTV footage, names, and payroll info — is eventually taken up by law enforcement will depend on the future of US-Indian cooperation. The FBI office in the New Delhi embassy can only do so much on its own in a legal system that struggles with corruption. Calls for Indian authorities to devote more resources to the issue are growing, both from Washington and from influential voices within the US-based Indian diaspora. "We've tried to build a reputation for India in this country," said journalist Yudhijit Bhattacharjee at the conclusion of his podcast series *Scam Likely*. "When I talk to Indian government officials, I keep repeating what a big mistake they're making in not taking it seriously. It's ultimately not only costing American victims billions of dollars but causing incalculable damage to the relationship between these two countries."

One of Bhattacharjee's sources, a Department of Homeland Security investigator, echoed his sentiments. The scam industry, he said, is "the largest cross-cultural communication ever to take place. They have made millions of calls from India. That is an amazing thing that people are receiving negatively. What does that do to future dialogue between Americans and Indians?"

A sharper version of this message has been delivered by Suhel Daud, the FBI's chief for South Asia and the agency's legal attaché at the Delhi embassy. Speaking to the *Times of India*, Daud said the country risks being labeled an "exporter" of fraud, a pointed echo of the Bush-era "war on terrorism" rhetoric that implies continued inaction is tantamount to "state-sponsored" belligerence. Whether this was just careless diplomatic phrasing or not, there are signs that Indian authorities have begun taking the scam industry more seriously. The government's latest anti-fraud initiative is named Operation Chakra, as if nothing less than the soul or "real self" of India is hanging in the balance.

As the country ages, there is only the coldest of comforts in the fact that seniors will increasingly have less to steal.

SCAM CULTURE is expanding in ways that only Philip K. Dick could have imagined when Ethel Percy Andrus first pleaded with Congress for federal resources back in 1963. Artificial intelligence (AI) will soon enable fraudsters to mimic the timbres and inflections of the voices of loved ones and federal officials, if not every other aspect of their likeness. Soon other AI-based scams will no doubt be widespread — call it “A Scammer Darkly” — as aging societies become more demographically top-heavy. By 2030, one in five Americans will be sixty-five or older; by 2060, it will be one in four, including a tripling of the current eighty-five-plus population.

What remains to be determined, however, are the underlying social conditions that this elderly population will inhabit. Countering the isolation and loneliness that haunt older people will require state interventions and programs, confronting the many scandals of eldercare — from hedge-fund-owned retirement home chains to endemic poverty — as well as reckoning with the deeper cultural issue of generational abandonment. This will mean fostering a revival of civil organizations and political engagement.

Not everybody can or wants to become a Gray Panther, but there are lessons worth exploring in the decline of unions and activism that has occurred alongside the steady rise of loneliness. There are also valuable lessons in the approach of Nordic welfare states that prioritize social care as much as health care, offering a state-sponsored version of the intergenerational support systems found in middle- and low-income countries. Along with education campaigns, we will have to rethink how older people can lead more fulfilling, socially connected lives.

If the last two decades have taught us anything, it is that we should not look to the internet to compensate for the loss of communal public life and family support. In a critical reappraisal of Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* published in these pages, Anton Jäger tracked how loneliness had worsened in the twenty years since the book’s publication in 2000, even as people of all ages spent growing portions of their waking lives on “social” platforms devoted to constant-contact communication. Contrary to the early promises of internet utopians, evidence shows that participating in online communities does not arrest social atomization but rather “accelerates and entrenches it.” The internet, wrote Jäger, “only becomes comprehensible in the world of the lonely bowler. Online culture thrives on the atomization that the neoliberal offensive has inflicted on society — there is now ample research showing positive correlation between declining civic commitment and broadband access.”

There is only the coldest of comforts in the fact that seniors will increasingly have less to steal than the current cohort of retired baby boomers. The United States already has the highest rate of elder poverty in the developed world, with one in three people aged sixty-five and older living under or near the poverty line. And as the country gets older, the average senior will also grow poorer. The five- and six-figure savings and pension payouts being lost to scammers in 2023 will become increasingly scarce.

In the absence of such major scores, the digital equivalent to the forged Social Security check may see a revival — a century of scamming come full circle. ■



How Death Became Big Business

BY NATALIE SHURE

Instead of caring for the elderly,
corporate interests are looking out
for their bottom line.

GOOGLING “NURSING HOME NEGLECT LAWSUIT” will make your stomach churn. Deanna Kay Mahoney died of sepsis in a hospital in Des Moines, Iowa, after her bedsores were allegedly left untended for so long that they became infected. John Curtright of Kansas City, Kansas, died of the same thing, and he was apparently displaying signs of malnourishment by the time his daughter checked him out of his nursing home to bring him to a nearby emergency room.

Across several facilities in New York State, human waste and discarded food trays left to fester in residents’ rooms reportedly triggered a rat problem. Mary Jo Staub froze to death after wandering out of her facility in Louisville, Kentucky, and being unable to regain entry. A resident in McHenry, Illinois, claimed his neck was fractured after he was dropped on the floor by a worker who’d been forced to lift patients alone thanks to short staffing.

These are a mere fraction of the nursing home deaths ascribable to profit-driven corner cutting: one Associated Press analysis pinned some forty thousand deaths on

neglect in nursing homes in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, not counting the staggering number of fatalities from the virus itself. In the years since, the sector received a no-strings-attached nine-figure federal windfall, allocating at least some of it to fighting tooth and nail against reforms like improved staffing ratios that could’ve made every one of those atrocities less likely to happen.

Lorded over by cartoonishly bad actors who set out to line investors’ pockets with as much public money as humanly possible, the depravity of institutional long-term care is a manifestation of the monetization of aging and dying in the United States, now a booming business. Nursing homes, home care, and even hospice have been largely captured by for-profit firms, which stand to bilk just as much revenue as the other players in our for-profit health care system — but without nearly as many regulatory impediments. For patients and their loved ones, the corporatization of elder- and disability care makes the most vulnerable part of life even more painful than it has to be.

AS HISTORIAN GABE WINANT recounts in his book *The Next Shift: The Fall of Industry and the Rise of Health Care in Rust Belt America*, much of the corporatization of health care — and of warehousing people in nursing homes specifically — emerged as a response to the social trauma of deindustrialization. Before the mid-twentieth century, eldercare was generally done by unpaid women in the home, who often toiled doing care work for three generations at once while their husbands performed wage labor in the manufacturing sector. When the boom began its long decline in the 1950s, it followed a reliable pattern. Steel bosses first tried to maintain profits by pushing workers harder, chipping away at wages and

benefits, which drove stress, injuries, and precarity, and the industry eventually started shedding workers along racial lines. Because black workers with less security to fall back on were let go first, their wives were the first to seek paid work outside the home — and they often found jobs in health care, a sector that had swelled thanks to union health plans and federal hospital construction.

As deindustrialization left communities older and sicker, with fewer female partners at home and available for unpaid caregiving, Medicare and Medicaid swooped in to fill the void. The latter came with a long-term institutional care benefit, which served an obvious need for the poorer and sicker people who were eligible for

the program. Upon the advent of Medicaid in 1965, the number of people in US nursing home facilities doubled in only eight years, while new Medicare enrollees fueled a parallel growth in community hospital use. From there, though, the payment model pathways diverged. With neoliberal grumbling about runaway health care costs in the late 1970s and early '80s, Medicare Part A shifted toward a fee-for-service model. Reorganizing payments by diagnosis, rather than a flat daily fee, encouraged hospitals to discharge patients as soon as possible. It also gave a major leg up to capital-intensive procedures and the flush, creditworthy hospitals that could buy up MRI machines and their own competitors. These moves, of course, expanded both their market share and their leverage to dictate prices, helping to drive the toxic dynamics most commonly associated with the US health care system today, like soaring costs and medical bankruptcy.

Meanwhile, the trajectory of nursing home care would play out very differently. The Medicaid long-term care benefit continued to pay a daily fee per nursing home resident, and aspiring bigwig nursing home tycoons had different incentives than the hospital executives did. Whereas the path toward endless growth for hospitals is through doubling down on big-ticket specialty care, professional prestige, and name-brand pedigree, cashing in on nursing homes is mostly just a matter of patient volume and cost cutting, with all but disposable patients and workers bearing the brunt of the misery that entails.

What that looks like in practice is nothing short of gruesome. In an industry that's 70 percent for-profit, non-essentials are ruthlessly cut. A recent *New Yorker* exposé recounted how, when a previously nonprofit nursing home was purchased by a private equity firm, the new bosses got rid of an aquarium in the common room, arts and crafts, and several menu items — with ownership changes, “the food always gets worse,” as one worker-organizer told me. They shuttered the dining hall and laid off the kitchen staff, packaging meals individually for residents to eat alone in their rooms. New management is notoriously slow to repair things like microwaves or to change lightbulbs. Even the bedsheets get crappier.

More gravely, profit-hungry owners find extra cash by squeezing their workers every way that they can, cutting staff to the bone. Depending on the state, one certified nursing assistant (CNA) can be responsible for dozens of residents at once. They're constantly triaging — darting

from room to room to handle the most pressing emergencies — so hours might go by before someone is available to clean up human waste. Residents are bathed less frequently and incur more injuries. And opportunities for joyful moments disappear. When working conditions are better, “you can preserve some dignity and quality of life for folks,” one health care union leader told me. “You can chat with Mrs Jones and, you know, curl her hair or paint her nails. You can spend twenty minutes watching a football game with Mr Johnson. You could have a sense of community, and have the kinds of deep relationships between workers and residents that do a lot for quality of life.” But only the oldest CNAs have memories of their jobs being anything like that. For most of those in the position now, things have gone from bad to worse.

And that was before COVID-19 hit. From there, the story is familiar, having played out in grim news stories across the country. Nursing homes fared dismally, particularly early on in the pandemic, accounting for around 40 percent of US COVID deaths in the first year. The combination of a warehoused, demographically vulnerable population, an industry with little regard for their well-being, a workforce so exploited that workers traveled between multiple jobs to make ends meet, and insufficient infection-control measures proved deadly. It shouldn't surprise anyone that the most egregious players in the business were also the most dangerous places to be, even when you adjust for everything else — private equity-owned facilities had 10 percent more fatalities relative to their peers, whereas unionized facilities had 30 percent fewer. Even amid the carnage, private equity companies saw an opportunity, buying up dozens of new facilities as the virus ripped through them.

Having thoroughly saturated the provision of institutional nursing care, it only makes sense that entrepreneurs have recently moved on to hospice care, also run for profit at a rate of roughly 70 percent. Here private corporations subsist nearly entirely on public funds — in this case, the Medicare hospice benefit, which, like Medicaid's nursing home funding, pays providers a flat daily rate. In a joint exposé from *ProPublica* and the *New Yorker*, journalist Ava Kofman described how the recent spike in for-profit hospice operators has played out: beyond the same old tricks used in nursing homes and elsewhere (spreading staff thin, exploiting workers, cheaping out on supplies, saddling assets with the debt it took to buy them), the

We deserve to die in ways that are less mediated by capitalism.

structure of the industry has given rise to what feels more or less like a morbid scam.

Since the hospice care payout is supposed to support people diagnosed with a terminal illness (defined as those with no more than six months to live), the rising for-profit hospice sector has cashed in on scooping up more and more clients — whether they're actually dying or not. Whistleblowing hospice workers have described how their bosses scouted out doctors with loosey-goosey definitions of what constitutes "terminal" or "less than six months to live," with some even scanning church prayer bulletins for extra sick new enrollees to balance out their averages. Once a company has too many long-duration enrollees on the books, it can simply "fire" patients who remain stubbornly alive, or insist that it's just as surprised as regulators that its clients aren't dying as imminently as it believed they would. After all, if making those determinations is more of an art than a science, is it *really* a for-profit hospice operator's fault that things keep panning out in its favor?

It's worth emphasizing how damn emotionally manipulative this is: a service intended to support patients and their families through one of the most intense, draining, and painful parts of their lives has been morphed into a game of book cooking, all for six months of Medicare revenue. For patients who aren't actually dying, getting unceremoniously dropped after half a year in hospice must range from disorienting to frightening. For those who are in fact dying, the dissonance between how hospice is described and how it really works can be upsetting, too: when it works the way it's supposed to, it can be the gentlest way to suffer through a terrible thing. When it doesn't — when home hospice lacks sufficient staff, palliative intervention, or training — family members can feel abandoned and overwhelmed, completing basic care tasks or administering pain medication themselves outside of brief agency visits.

It should disturb every one of us that any for-profit entity, let alone the private equity firms bullishly buying up whatever they can, is so interested in this sector to

begin with. If the basic pitch of private equity firms is that they've perfected the art of short-term profits, it's worth asking where exactly endless productivity growth in a field dedicated to the needs of dying people and their families is supposed to come from. Unlike hospitals and factories, nursing homes and hospice agencies don't have as much room to invest in more efficient machines or jack up their prices. To keep hitting their targets with flat fees from public coffers, the options are limited: spreading workers thinner, dreaming up new ways to make patient subsistence still cheaper, increasing volume by consolidation or lying, and lobbying for public policies even more amenable to profitmaking. As shareholders demand quarter after quarter after quarter of profits, it's only going to get worse. The low- and middle-hanging fruit is already gone.

We deserve to die in ways that are less mediated by capitalism. Most of us inevitably want similar things, even if the specific details are different: at the end of our lives, we want as many opportunities for joy as we can get. We want to be part of meaningful communities. We want to be cared for, respected, and valued. And we want the people surrounding us — both our loved ones and the workers serving us through our most vulnerable moments — to be cared for, respected, and valued, too.

But far too often, the for-profit death industry makes all that impossible. What we deserve in its place is universal, supportive, socialized care at the end of our lives, to each according to his or her needs. And those services should be delivered in appropriate community settings, by people with enough control over their working conditions to insist that care includes chitchat and board games, and who can afford to stick with one job long enough to become close to patients and their families.

This is the kind of intimacy and dignity we owe the sick and elderly. Good care — within the health care system and outside of it — is resource intensive, and it will never be particularly profitable. We need to build a system that sustains it anyway. ■

THE INTERNATIONAL



WHERE COMMUNISTS LIVE FOREVER

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program has become a
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**Africa: No continent
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Wagner mercenaries pg. 82

BEACH BUMS AND DESERT DIALYSIS

Each year, more people travel abroad for critical medical treatment as well as aesthetic plastic surgery procedures. South Asia and South America remain major destinations.

Every year, millions of people return from vacation with shapelier noses, bigger butts, and tighter stomachs. They are fresh from places like Seoul, where travelers can get free “skin age” analysis in Incheon Airport, and Istanbul, where hair-transplant patients with bandaged heads are a common sight on historic thoroughfare Istiklal Street.

Yet cosmetic surgery is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to medical tourism, a growing global economic sector in which the wealthy residents of medically impoverished countries and the impoverished residents of countries where health care is astronomically expensive are united in their pursuit of critical treatments abroad. According to the World Health Organization, the industry is already worth more than \$100 billion — and it’s set to grow explosively in the coming years.

Why go to the trouble of traveling when you’re already unwell? The numbers

speak for themselves: a heart bypass surgery that costs \$113,000 in the United States can be had for \$20,000 in Singapore, \$10,000 in India, and as little as \$3,250 in Poland. No surprise that in 2019, an estimated 23 million people went abroad for health care — nearly half of them seeking oncological, neurological, and cardiovascular care.

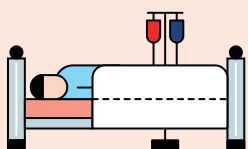
Key medical vacation destinations are making the best of the growing demand on their health care systems. Turkey, for example, actively encourages medical tourism, creating tax-free health care zones and offering a discount to foreigners who fly Turkish Airlines en route to their treatment. Dozens of “recovery retreats” have opened near San José, Costa Rica; at these deluxe resorts, medical tourists can enjoy massages, gourmet meals, and ocean views while receiving postoperative care.

Businesses in wealthy countries have also found ways to profit off people fleeing sky-high hospital bills. If you can receive an essential procedure cheaply in Mexico or the Caribbean, many US employers

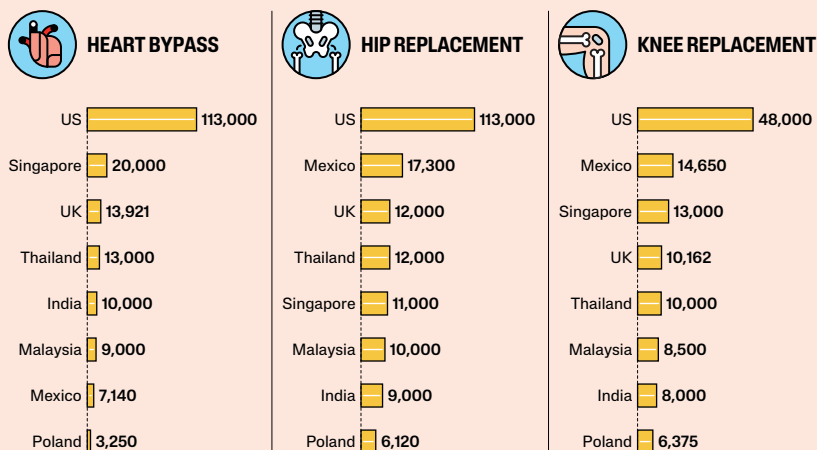
will actually pay you to do so — though not in the full amount the trip would save their health plan, of course. You can book the procedure through Qunomedical or MediGO, among the largest of the many start-ups that have emerged to connect patients with far-flung doctors, netting millions of dollars in seed funding and revenue.

But for most, it is bare necessity, not corporate perks, that motivate such “vacations.” In the United States, where the American Dental Association has lobbied for decades against including full dental coverage in Medicare and Medicaid, a shocking number of seniors and low-income people cross the Mexican border to receive services in Los Algodones, better known as “Molar City.”

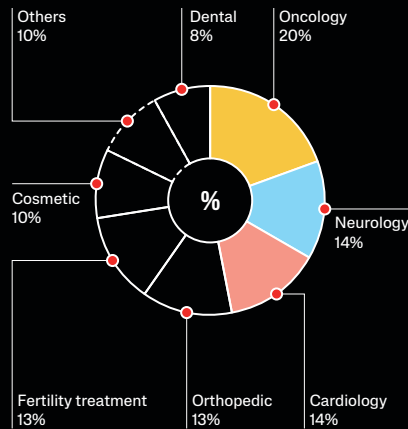
Darker is the case of Iran, whose policy of forcing gay people to undergo sex reassignment surgery has given it a legal and dirt-cheap transition-care industry. Exorbitant costs at home are enough to convince some Europeans to undergo gender-affirming procedures in a country that has a death penalty for same-sex activity.



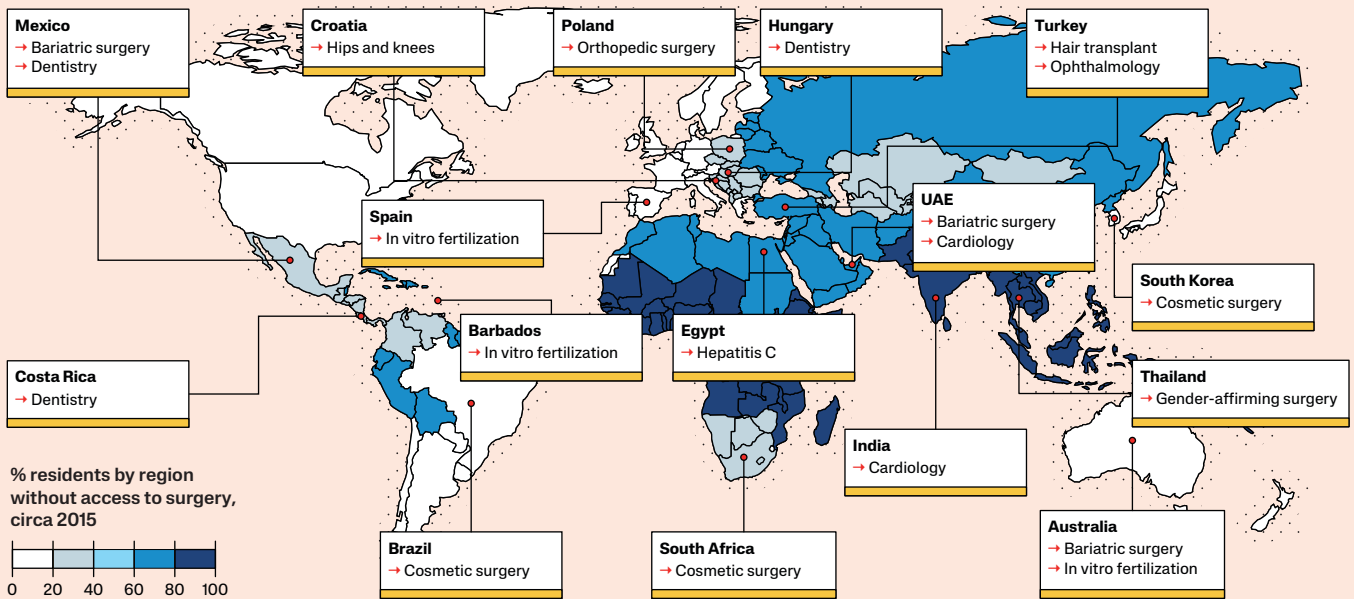
THE UNITED STATES IS THE MOST EXPENSIVE MEDICAL TOURISM DESTINATION FOR THREE COMMON TREATMENTS:



ONCOLOGY, NEUROLOGY, AND CARDIOLOGY CARE MAKE UP ALMOST HALF OF THE MEDICAL TOURISM MARKET:

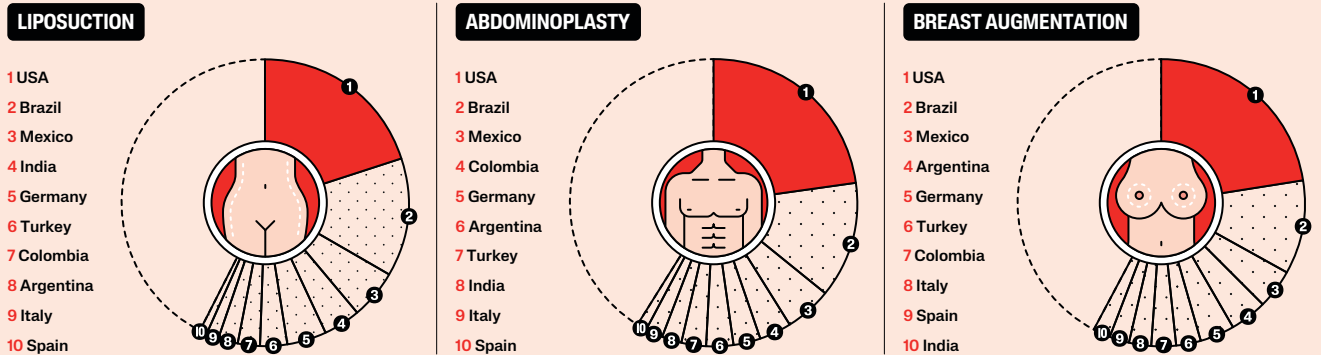


HOT SPOTS FOR TREATMENT



Source: Economist

COUNTRIES PERFORMING THE MOST POPULAR PLASTIC SURGERIES



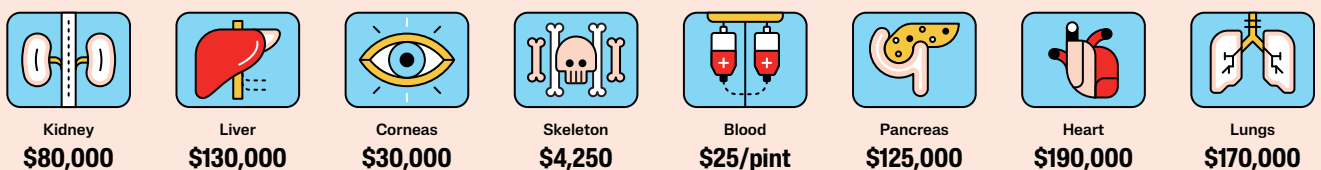
Source: International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery

CARE THAT COSTS AN ARM AND A LEG

Some enter the medical tourism market to buy, but others enter to sell. The \$1.7 billion global market for trafficked organ transplants serves an unknown number of patients from rich nations who hope to skip the line for a new

kidney by buying one harvested from a Syrian refugee or a Pakistani bonded laborer. About 10% of organ transplants worldwide are thought to occur through “transplant tourism” of varying shades of legality.

Source: Global Financial Integrity; Scott Carney, *The Red Market: On the Trail of the World's Organ Brokers, Bone Thieves, Blood Farmers, and Child Traffickers* (2011); *Wired*.



Americas

In Summary

GUATEMALA

Guatemala voted for a new president on August 20, with 60.9% of the vote going to the progressive Bernardo Arévalo. The contest, which pitted Arévalo against former first lady and establishment favorite Sandra Torres, was heralded as a breakthrough in a country where most opposition candidates have been barred from running. Arévalo, son of the beloved Juan José Arévalo, Guatemala's first democratically elected president, ran on a platform calling to fight corruption in order to rebuild state capacity and restore public trust in the country's political institutions.



National Unity
of Hope
37.2%

Movimiento Semilla
60.9%

Source: Tribunal Supremo Electoral (Guatemala)

ARGENTINA

Right-wing economist Javier Milei emerged as the leading candidate in the upcoming presidential race following an August 13 primary in which he won a third of the vote. If elected, the libertarian has vowed to peg the Argentine peso to the US dollar — the move that brought on the country's 2001 financial meltdown — and abolish the central bank.

JACOBIN.COM

August 23, 2023

**Argentina's Economic
Crisis Has Become a
Political Crisis**

July 21, 2023

**Wildfires Are Exposing Canada's
Willed Ignorance of the Realities
of Climate Change**

CANADA'S ASSISTED SUICIDE PROGRAM HAS BECOME A NIGHTMARE

BY JEREMEY APPEL

A medical assistance in dying program seemed like a step forward for choice and dignity. But it is beginning to look like a dystopian end run around the cost of providing long-term care.

► **I ALWAYS THOUGHT** legalizing euthanasia was a no-brainer.

It seemed to me like an individual choice people ought to have, akin to legalizing abortion or same-sex marriage. If someone is in such pain that they decide to die, I thought, who are we as a society to tell them that they can't?

There's also a harm-reduction component. If someone is dead set on ending their life, shouldn't we give them a relatively safe, effective option under medical supervision? It would be cruel not to.

This was the rationale behind the 2015 Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Carter v. Canada*, which determined that prohibition of medical assistance in dying (MAiD) was unconstitutional.

But the legalization has brought to the fore some disturbing moral calculations, particularly with its expansion in 2019 to include individuals whose deaths aren't "reasonably foreseeable." This change opened the floodgates for people with disabilities to apply to die rather than survive on meager benefits.

BRAZIL

In what might spell the end of his political career, former president Jair Bolsonaro was ruled ineligible for public office for the next eight years, following his conviction for using government media to promote his presidential campaign and spreading misinformation in order to influence the 2022 elections.

Meanwhile, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva convened a summit with other Amazonian nations to design a set of common policy objectives for the rainforest. The Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization seeks to form a bloc that would act in concert in international negotiations affecting the Amazon region.

June 28, 2023

Canada Is Trying to Stop AMLO From Putting Mexico in Control of Its Own Resources

I've come to realize that euthanasia in Canada represents the cynical endgame of social provisioning under the brutal logic of late-stage capitalism — we'll starve you of the funding you need to live a dignified life, and if you don't like it, well, why don't you just kill yourself?

"It's Better Than Blowing Your Brains Out"

Tim Stainton, director of the Canadian Institute for Inclusion and Citizenship at the University of British Columbia, told the Associated Press that Canada's MAiD policy is "probably the biggest existential threat to disabled people since the Nazis' program in Germany in the 1930s."

This sounds hyperbolic, but there are endless examples of people with disabilities who were offered euthanasia as an alternative to living a life of pain and exclusion. And with the impending expansion of MAiD to include people with mental illnesses, the problem is only going to get worse.

At least four veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have been offered MAiD, including

one instance where a case-worker allegedly told a veteran that MAiD is a preferable alternative to "blowing your brains out against the wall." Mark Meincke, a veteran of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry who spoke to that veteran on his podcast, told the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs that the individual in question had never even contemplated suicide. He just wanted help dealing with his PTSD and other ailments.

"He expressed to me that things were sunshine and roses prior to this phone call," Meincke told the committee. "He was feeling good about life.... He left the country because he was devastated by this phone call."

In another instance, retired corporal Christine Gauthier, who is paraplegic and competed for Canada at the Rio de Janeiro 2016 Paralympics and the Invictus Games, was offered assisted suicide, with Veterans Affairs proposing to supply her with the necessary equipment.

Gauthier had been fighting for five years to have the agency provide her with a wheelchair ramp. They wouldn't provide the ramp,

June 6, 2023

Ecuador's "Blue" Bond Deal Won't Save the Galapagos

June 4, 2023

The US Is Punishing Cuba to Send a Message to the Whole World



Canadian athlete Christine Gauthier receives the gold medal in the women's heavyweight powerlifting finals at the Invictus Games on May 9, 2016, in Lake Buena Vista, Florida.

but they would give her the means to end her life.

Former Veterans Affairs minister Lawrence MacAulay cast doubt on Gauthier's case, insisting that, to his knowledge, there was just one individual case-worker — who no longer worked for the agency — responsible for offering assisted suicide to four veterans. But then again, maybe not.

"I feel that possibly this is all that's there, but I don't know," he said.

An excellent piece from *Global News* reporters Brennan Leffler and Marianne Dimain, headlined "How poverty, not pain, is driving Canadians with dis-

abilities to consider medically-assisted death," notes the "excruciating cycle of poverty" that leads disabled people to choose assisted death over lives filled with barriers to their existence.

"The numbers are grim," Leffler and Dimain write.

Looking across the country, provincial disability support rates vary from a low of \$705 per month in New Brunswick, to a high of \$1,685 in Alberta. Try getting by on \$1,228 per month in Toronto, or \$1,358 in Vancouver, where the average rent on a one-bedroom apartment is about \$2,500.

The result is that, according to a 2017 report from

COLOMBIA

President Gustavo Petro celebrated his first year in office despite political setbacks, taking the opportunity to point out that, legislative defeats notwithstanding, his government has achieved several important measures, including a fiscal reform that raises income tax on the country's top earners and agrarian reform that will distribute land and credit to small farmers.



MEXICO

As Andrés Manuel López Obrador enters his sixth and final year in office, the contest to find a political successor builds momentum. To date, Claudia Sheinbaum (former mayor of Mexico City) and Marcelo Ebrard (former secretary of foreign affairs) are locked in competition to succeed the wildly popular president for the MORENA party ticket, with the former leading in public opinion polls.

Statistics Canada, nearly a quarter of disabled people are living in poverty. That's roughly 1.5 million people, almost the population of Montreal.

Joannie Cowie, who has cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, Guillain-Barre syndrome, epilepsy, and a fractured back, certainly fits the criteria for MAiD. But the meager assistance she receives for herself and her daughter, who is also disabled, has made the pain all the more unbearable.

"People with disabilities have been put on the backburner and nobody gives a damn about them," she told *Global News*. "I've cried a lot at night. I usually stay up a lot of the night. I pray. I pray a lot."

Are There No Prisons? Are There No MAiD Programs?

The case of Alan Nichols demonstrates how uncomfortably permissive Canada's euthanasia framework is. Nichols, who suffered from depression, was hospitalized in June 2019 over fears he was suicidal. Upon hospitalization, he asked his brother Gary to "bust him out" as soon as possible.

A month later, Nichols successfully applied for MAiD — not for depression, which is not yet legal, but for

hearing loss, which occurred as a result of brain surgery when he was twelve.

His family, which filed a police report and notified health authorities, said there was no way he was eligible for MAiD, arguing that he had refused to take his meds and use his cochlear implant, which would have helped his hearing.

"Alan was basically put to death," Gary Nichols said.

Sean Tagert, who suffered from Lou Gehrig's disease, chose to end his life in August 2019 at the age of forty-one, leaving behind an eleven-year-old son. While his condition required him to receive twenty-four-hour care, the government would only provide funding for sixteen hours, forcing him to pay \$263.50 a day for the remaining eight hours.

He called the option of institutionalization, as opposed to fully funded care, a "death sentence."

Roger Foley, who was hospitalized with a degenerative brain disorder in London, Ontario, began surreptitiously recording his conversations with hospital workers who offered him euthanasia unprompted.

In one recording, the hospital's director of ethics told him continuing care would

We'll starve you of funding, and if you don't like it, well, why don't you just kill yourself?

cost "north of \$1,500 a day," the Associated Press reported, which he correctly regarded as coercive.

There are far more reported instances of this sort of coercion than I have space to relay. And these are just the instances that we know of.

Distinguishing Choice From Coercion

"When people are living in such a situation where they're structurally placed in poverty, is medical assistance in dying really a choice or is it coercion? That's the question we need to ask ourselves," Dr Naheed Dosani, a palliative care physician in Toronto, told *Global News*.


Many countries that allow assisted suicide have far more safeguards than Canada does for ensuring situations like those described above don't occur, making it extremely puzzling as to why Canada didn't implement them from the outset.

Chief among those safeguards is the requirement in

Belgium and the Netherlands that doctors have exhausted all treatment alternatives before offering medically assisted death. Both countries also have monthly commissions to review potentially troubling cases.

In the Australian province of Victoria, doctors are prohibited from bringing up assisted suicide at all, unless a patient inquires about it. In Belgium, doctors are discouraged, although not prohibited, from doing so.

I still believe it's cruel to refuse MAiD to people on the verge of death, with no prospects for recovery. But it's even crueler to offer death as an alternative to a properly funded social support system.

We've let the MAiD genie out of its bottle. There's no going back. We must ensure that our health care systems have sufficient resources to guarantee everyone, regardless of ability or mental health, a dignified existence. 

PERU

Seven months after the parliamentary coup that removed Pedro Castillo from office, Peru remains in a state of turmoil as interim president Dina Boluarte refuses to step down. Eight out of ten Peruvians feel the acting president should resign. Throughout July, a reported one-third of the country protested in the streets, calling for snap elections.

ECUADOR

Luisa González of Rafael Correa's left-wing Citizen Revolution Movement emerged with a 33% plurality in a snap general election, though the race was marred by the assassination of presidential candidate and anti-corruption crusader Fernando Villavicencio just days before the first round of voting. González and her opponents will face off again in an October runoff.

VENEZUELA

Venezuela won a major court battle to recover \$1.6 billion held in escrow by a Portuguese bank largely owned by American private equity firm Lone Star Funds. International sanctions have caused the freezing of many of Venezuela's overseas assets, further aggravating the country's dire economic and social situation.

Europe

In Summary

GREECE

After a May general election failed to produce a majority government, Greek voters returned to the polls under a different electoral system and gave the incumbent prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis's right-wing New Democracy 158 of 300 seats in the Hellenic Parliament, granting him another four years in office. Despite pervasive allegations of government authoritarianism, including a wiretapping scandal, Mitsotakis's party mobilized its base around signs of economic recovery, especially in the tourism and real estate sectors. The left-wing Syriza slumped to 47 seats, snagging less than half as many votes as it had upon winning office on an anti-austerity ticket back in January 2015.



RUSSIA

The government-funded paramilitary Wagner Group began a short-lived march toward Moscow in protest of official mishandling of the war effort. After Vladimir Putin declared he would "crush" the rebellion, its leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, called off the action, retreating to Belarus with some of his men in an agreement brokered by that country's authoritarian leader, Aleksandr Lukashenko.

JACOBIN.COM

August 26, 2023

Far-Right Political Violence Is on the Rise in Germany

WHERE COMMUNISTS LIVE FOREVER

BY PANAGIOTIS SOTIRIS

Longevity on the Greek island of Ikaria remains a mystery. Could communism be the key to a longer and more fulfilling life?

► **WHEN ÉTIENNE CABET** published *Voyage en Icarie* in 1840, he was trying to present his vision of communism in the form of a story. This was the heyday of utopian socialist dreams — when the very words "socialism" and "communism" first emerged — and before Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's virulent attacks on such schemes in *The Communist Manifesto*.

In those days, such literature was effectively kick-starting real-world experimentation. Cabet didn't just write a book about his imaginary Icaria; he tried to establish actual Icarian colonies in the United States to put such communist ideals into practice. But things did not go as

Cabet expected. There was internal strife within the colonies, and Cabet himself was judged to be too authoritarian. A few Icarian communities managed to survive for some decades before the last was dissolved at the end of the century.

But what about *actual* Ikaria — the very real Greek island in the east Aegean Sea, ten nautical miles southwest of Samos? Just under a hundred square miles, it's mostly mountainous and has a population of 8,312. Compared to the islands of Cyclades, Rhodes, Corfu, and Crete, it's not much of a tourist destination, though it does attract summer visitors.

FRANCE

The police killing of 17-year-old Nahel Merzouk prompted widespread protests and rioting across France. After President Emmanuel Macron condemned the shooting, police unions denounced the government, in turn encouraging ministers to take a tough line against the mostly teenage rioters.



August 25, 2023

The Left Can Form a New Government in Spain

August 12, 2023

In Bulgaria, Mass Protests Are Confronting Domestic Violence

July 31, 2023

As Italy and Greece Burn, Their Leaders Obsess About Immigrants

July 19, 2023

Ireland Should Resist the Pressure to Join the Western Military Bloc



Some of the Ikarian elderly enjoy themselves at a café in Evdilos Village, November 2022.

Ikaria is one of the five “blue zones” — places where it is common for people to live over a hundred years.

For social scientists, however, this Ikaria is, in fact, a kind of utopia. It is one of the five “blue zones” — places where it is common for people to live over a hundred years. Others include Loma Linda in California, Nicoya in Costa Rica, Sardinia in Italy, and Okinawa in Japan.

Stamatis Moraitis, a World War II veteran from Ikaria, left the island for the United States in 1943. Diagnosed with terminal lung cancer in 1976, he opted to return to his island in order to die there. Since a funeral would be much cheaper in Ikaria, he figured he could leave a

larger part of his retirement savings to his family. But on returning, his health began to improve, and he lived nearly another four decades, dying in 2013 at age 98 (or 102, since he did not remember his actual date of birth) — his health finally deteriorating upon the death of his beloved wife a year prior.

Longevity in Ikaria is the subject of the Ikaria Study, a collective research effort led by professor Christodoulos Stefanadis of the University of Athens Medical School. The results point to a few theories on the particular longevity observed on the island. First of all, there is the strictly followed Mediterranean diet, which includes increased consumption of olive oil, fruit, and vegetables and reduced consumption of meat, moderate

consumption of fish, moderate consumption of wine, and also moderate consumption of coffee. Then there is the outdoor, physical activity as part of everyday life, with most people walking wherever they need to go and spending their days tending their gardens. There is also a general rhythm of life that is relaxed, with naps every afternoon. And finally, there is a strong sense of belonging in island life.

But perhaps there is another reason. Ikaria is, after all, an island with a very strong communist tradition. In the June 2023 general election, the Communist Party got 36 percent of the vote. It's not a recent phenomenon — a quick glance at election results over the years shows numerous instances in which the Communist Party was the leading political force on the island. One of the very oldest voters in the election was 104-year-old Zaharias Pyroudias, a veteran communist and lifelong Ikarian.

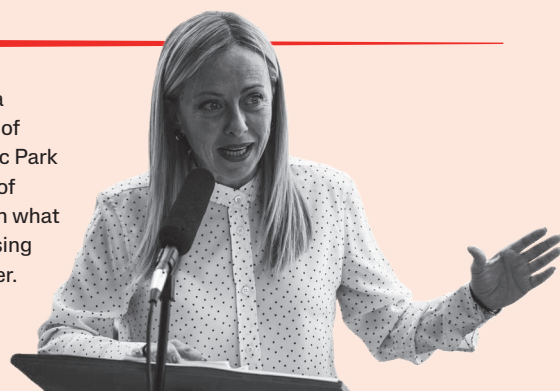
During the German and especially the Italian occupations, Ikaria suffered from famine. The population turned to the National

MOLDOVA

Relations between Moldova and Russia continue to falter amid the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. In August, the Moldovan government ordered Russia to reduce its diplomatic presence in the country from 80 staffers to 25.

ITALY

Far-right prime minister Giorgia Meloni launched a defamation suit against the musician Brian Molko of Placebo after he criticized her onstage at the Sonic Park music festival near Turin. It is the latest in a string of similar suits against journalists and publications, in what critics label an attempt to intimidate opposition using Italian laws that make defamation a criminal matter.



Around fourteen thousand Communists and their sympathizers were exiled to Ikaria, and the local population opened its arms to them.

The picturesque Armenistis, a fishing village that serves as an important economic hub for the island, is one of the most popular destinations in Ikaria.

Liberation Front for help, kicking off a wave of local self-organization. Then, in 1947–48, during the Greek Civil War, around fourteen thousand Communists and their sympathizers were exiled to Ikaria, and the local population of around eleven thousand opened its arms to them. This strong sense of solidarity persisted through the violence of the period. A group of eight wanted Communists managed to survive on the island, despite

constant searches from the gendarmerie and the army, until they left in 1955. One of them, Antonis Kalampogias, would return illegally in 1968, during the dictatorship of the colonels, to help rebuild Communist organizations in Greece.

So what's the secret to longevity? It may have something to do with the Mediterranean diet and a belief that communism is still worth fighting for. ◀



LITHUANIA

A NATO summit in Vilnius in July brought together heads of state and government from across the Western military alliance. During the summit, both Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, announced they would drop their earlier opposition to membership for Sweden.

ICELAND

In a show of solidarity with Ukraine, Iceland became the first country to suspend work at its embassy in Moscow in August.

SPAIN

A snap general election resulted in a close finish between Pedro Sánchez's ruling Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and Alberto Núñez Feijóo's People's Party (PP). The conservative PP had been widely expected to win the election, but better-than-expected results for PSOE instead produced a hung parliament.

In Summary

LEBANON

An audit of the Lebanese central bank — mandated by creditors amid the catastrophic collapse of the country's economy — revealed deliberate obfuscation of the bank's financial statements between 2015 and 2020, sparking wide-ranging international sanctions against Riad Salameh, the bank's former governor.



Lebanese protesters defile posters bearing portraits of the former governor of Lebanon's central bank during an eruption of unrest amid the worsening economic crisis, January 25, 2023.

IRAN

Iran and the United States are negotiating a deal in which Iran will free five imprisoned Americans in exchange for \$6 billion in Iranian funds that are currently frozen in South Korean banks under US sanctions. This money will be administered by the Qatari government for the purchase of much-needed basic necessities in Iran.

AI-ASSISTED APARTHEID

BY AHMAD IBSAIS

Israel wants to compile biometric profiles and security ratings for every resident of the West Bank. Amazon is helping.

► "WHERE IS AHMAD?"

Israeli military forces demanded after boarding a bus from Ramallah headed toward Jerusalem.

They were looking for me.

I was on a religious pilgrimage to pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque, but as a Palestinian dual national with a Palestinian ID, I cannot visit areas of occupied Palestine without a special permit called a Tasree7, which takes several months to obtain. After locating me on the bus, Israeli forces violently removed me; an armed soldier then scanned my face, my passport, and other personal information and told me the information will be "permanently recorded" in

their system and used against me if I attempt to make the journey again.

My treatment was not unusual. Israel's apartheid state is being sponsored by tech giants, with artificial intelligence (AI) and other surveillance technologies used to deepen the long-standing repression of Palestinians. In 2021's Operation Guardian of the Walls, which saw Israel bombard the Gaza Strip with air strikes, leaving one thousand Palestinians displaced and 256 dead, "AI was a force multiplier," according to an Israeli official. In the years since, companies like Amazon have powered what a recent Amnesty

TURKEY

Following a renewed expression of interest from Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the European Union agreed to reinstate membership discussions with Turkey under a few conditions, namely movement toward the reunification of partly Turkish-occupied Cyprus and Turkish acceptance of the EU's standards for human rights.



August 28, 2023

Sanctions Against Iran Have Made the Country's Rich Richer and Its Poor Poorer

August 13, 2023

Benjamin Netanyahu's Judicial Reform Is About Supercharging the Occupation of Palestine

August 11, 2023

Kais Saied Is Building a New Dictatorship in Tunisia — With Help From the EU

July 20, 2023

Kurds Will Pay the Price for Sweden's NATO Deal



International report dubbed “automated apartheid.”

Amazon announced recently that it would invest another \$7.2 billion in Israel through 2037 and extend its web services to the country.

The company claims the benefactors of Amazon Web Services (AWS) will be Israeli

entrepreneurs and businesses. In reality, the primary winner will be the military. AWS will expand Project Nimbus, which provides the cloud service ecosystem for Israel, primarily serving the country's military. (Google also invests in Project Nimbus.)

The project will allow Israeli forces to obtain and retain data on Palestinians and surveil them with facial recognition, clamping down on the right to protest and making Palestinians warier of, say, appearing at a demonstration. Even if they aren't detained at the protest itself,

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, flanked by air force personnel, examines a Hermes 900 drone during his visit to the Palmachim Airbase near the city of Rishon LeZion on July 5, 2023.

JORDAN

Citing funding shortfalls, the UN's World Food Programme slashed aid by one-third for the 120,000 Syrian refugees living in the Zaatari and Azraq camps in Jordan. Nearly 60% of refugees living in these camps say that the money they receive from the UN (previously \$32 per person per month, now a mere \$21) is their only source of income.

EGYPT

While the Egyptian government has scrapped plans to send rockets to Russia in support of its ongoing invasion of Ukraine, it is refusing Washington's request that it redirect those weapons to Ukraine.

SAUDI ARABIA

Efforts by the US government to normalize Saudi-Israeli relations have seemingly fallen flat, following Saudi declaration that they will agree to the terms only if accompanied by a binding US-Saudi defense agreement — unlikely, given Saudi Arabia's unpopularity in Washington.

Palestinians know the numerous watchtowers and checkpoints will capture their faces and that they could be arrested later or banned from visiting certain sites. Amnesty International's report found that protests outside Jerusalem's Damascus Gate plummeted after various watchtowers and cameras were erected.

The ties between Israel and Amazon run deep. As of 2019, Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) had converted 80 percent of Amazon's aircraft fleet from passenger to cargo use. Buoyed by Amazon's investment, IAI is implementing autonomous "robo-snipers" and drones across Gaza and the occupied West Bank.

The implications for Palestinians at any of the more than one hundred checkpoints across the West Bank are frightening. Human error or miscalculation in

murdering Palestinians beats highly intelligent technology that does not give a second thought to the commands it receives.

In two West Bank refugee camps, for instance, turrets armed with a lens and a gun look out over protests. Using AI to identify targets, soldiers — safely removed from the fracas — can simply press a remote to shoot stun grenades, tear gas, or sponge-tipped bullets.

Israeli soldiers haven't distinguished themselves as paragons of morality in their role as occupiers. But further isolating soldiers from the potentially lethal implications of their decisions can only produce more brutality. As a spokesperson for the rights group B'Tselem told the Associated Press last year, "Israel is using technology as a means to control the civil population." ▶

Using AI to identify targets, soldiers can simply press a remote to shoot stun grenades, tear gas, or sponge-tipped bullets.

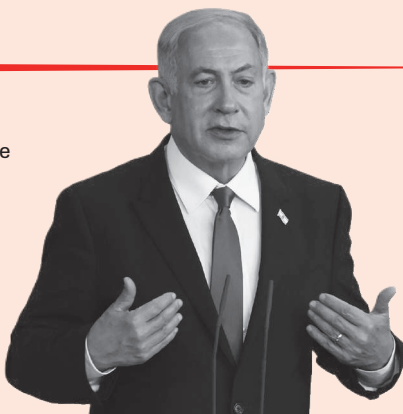
An Israeli soldier flies a military drone used for bringing down incendiary balloons from Gaza during a media demonstration by the Israeli Defense Forces near Rishon LeZion, November 26, 2019.



The project will allow Israeli forces to obtain data on Palestinians and surveil them with facial recognition.

ISRAEL

Protests against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's proposed judicial reforms continue to escalate, with thousands of members of the military reserve threatening to go on strike if the proposals are not dropped. The Israeli Supreme Court will have a hearing on the legislation, which skews the balance of power toward the executive branch, in September.



IRAQ

US sanctions against Iran have been felt in Iraq as well, with the Iraqi dinar falling 17% against the US dollar following new American efforts to halt the flow of dollars into Iran. To that end, 14 Iraqi banks have been summarily banned from USD transactions.

Africa

JACOBIN.COM

August 12, 2023

Zambia's Debt Crisis Will Be a Turning Point for the Global South

In Summary

SIERRA LEONE

Incumbent president Julius Maada Bio, a former military junta leader who now helms the centrist Sierra Leone People's Party, was elected to a second five-year term in the first round with 56% of the vote — drawing skepticism from observers, who allege a lack of transparency and statistical inconsistencies in the results. Bio established free education for all citizens and made efforts to address endemic sexual violence and other issues affecting women, yet his first civilian stint in the top spot was blighted by persistent economic downturn, which will remain a major issue during his second term.



All People's
Congress
41%

Sierra Leone
People's Party
56%

ETHIOPIA

Less than a year after the end of the Tigray War — which left millions displaced and as many as 378,000 dead — a new conflict between rebels and government forces kicked off in the Amhara region following the announcement that the government would dismantle regional militias, much to the protest of Amharic nationalists.

NO CONTINENT FOR YOUNG MEN

BY BENJAMIN FOGEL

The average African is 19 years old. The continent's average politician is 62 and getting older — and more authoritarian.

► **AFRICA HAS THE WORLD'S** youngest population, but it's ruled by a legion of old men. While the average African is nineteen years old, the continent's average politician is sixty-two.

For the past two decades, leaders in the Global North have fretted about demographic aging and its impact on the welfare state. Africa does not have that problem — its population is estimated to double over the next thirty years, with 42 percent of the global youth population estimated to be African by 2030.

And yet Africa's youth — or at least the nonelderly —

have mostly failed to take over the continent's halls of power. The oldest leader in Africa is Paul Biya, the ninety-year-old president of Cameroon, who has ruled since 1982. He is followed by the likes of eighty-two-year-old Alassane Ouattara, the president of Ivory Coast, who has ruled the country since 2010; eighty-one-year-old Teodoro Obiang Nguema, president for life of oil-rich Equatorial Guinea since 1979; eighty-year-old Zimbabwean president Emmerson Mnangagwa, who came to power at the ripe age of seventy-four via the military coup that removed ninety-three-year-old president



NIGER

Following a successful July military coup, a new government has adopted a distinctly anti-colonial, anti-francophone position. Aligning itself closely with Russia, the junta has already slashed trade and military deals with France, despite both French and Nigerian threats to intervene militarily to restore ousted president Mohamed Bazoum.

August 7, 2023

The Niger Coup Risks Opening Another Front in the West's War With Russia

June 2, 2023

Fintech and Microfinance Are Preying on the Global Poor



Left: Rwandan president Paul Kagame (left) shakes hands with Cameroonian president Paul Biya during the US-Africa Space Forum in Washington, DC, December 13, 2022.

Robert Mugabe after decades of rule; and seventy-eight-year-old Ugandan head of state Yoweri Museveni, who lost the 1980 election only to launch a war to assume the presidency in 1986.

It's happening even in Africa's largest economies. You would be hard-pressed to find anyone under sixty in South Africa's current administration, and even the leaders of the African National Congress Youth League are pushing forty, leading to the joke about still being "youth-league young." And while Nigeria's new president, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, is only seventy-one, his predecessor, Muhammadu Buhari, former dictator turned elected president, was eighty. It's not just a problem with political office, either — the youth of these

Below: A protester wears a mask of Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika during a demonstration demanding Bouteflika's resignation in Place de la République in Paris, France, March 17, 2019.



countries are also locked out economically. In South Africa, the continent's most industrialized country, youth unemployment is at least 52 percent. Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, has a similar unemployment rate.

What brought about this generational lopsidedness?

Gerontocracy isn't an inevitable result of some African tradition of elder veneration gone awry. To the contrary, it's a result of the modern world's arrival on the continent — with the authoritarian

governments it facilitated acting on the imperatives of the IMF and handing over control of public policy to consultants like McKinsey & Company. They imposed a transfer of power and public assets into private hands known as "structural adjustment."

The result of these policies in Africa was systemic disinvestment in public education and the deliberate destruction of higher education in country after country, leaving many of the continent's

BURKINA FASO AND MALI

The ruling military juntas of both states sent delegations to Niger to demonstrate solidarity with the new government following threats of foreign military intervention. They issued a statement proclaiming that any military action against Niger would double as a "declaration of war" against them.

SOUTH AFRICA

Former president Jacob Zuma was sent back to prison for contempt of court after his medical parole was ruled unlawful. After two hours, he was released along with close to 10,000 other inmates through a "special remission" program. Zuma's previous imprisonment had triggered mass unrest in the country's two most populous provinces, leaving 350 dead and billions of dollars in damage to key infrastructure.

NIGERIA

New president Bola Tinubu, elected controversially only two months ago, is facing domestic pushback after threatening military intervention in neighboring Niger to reverse the July coup. Those threats have met with strong opposition in Nigeria's upper chamber of parliament, including from Tinubu's own party.



African National Congress Youth League members block the Democratic Alliance from marching on the ANC headquarters during the Power to the People march in Johannesburg, South Africa, January 25, 2023.

great institutions — such as the University of Dar es Salaam, the intellectual center of global Marxism in the 1970s — as shadows of their former selves. This was combined with the authoritarian slide of many former liberation movements and repression against the unionists and activists who protested

these policies. Many of the Africans who would have otherwise emerged as the next generation of leaders have instead sought a better life elsewhere.

The other part of this story is the wider economic destruction caused by these structural adjustment policies, which impeded efforts to build not only a manufacturing base but even functional public infrastructure — all while removing the already limited welfare-state elements created in the years following liberation. This along with sectarian conflict, political factionalism, and

Africa's youth — or at least the nonelderly — have mostly failed to take over the continent's halls of power.

the stubborn tendency of former liberation movements to use their popular legitimacy to cling to power has meant a dearth of economic opportunities for the young.

The result is hundreds of millions of disenfranchised and often unemployed young people left dreaming of a better future. Millions are forced to eke out a living in the informal sector, embracing the “hustle to survive” ethos. There is a demographic with a universal complaint — things simply don't work, and the old people don't want to give up power. According to one study, majorities in the thirty-four countries polled support age limits for leaders.

This is the stuff revolutions tend to be made of. In 2018, the youth of Sudan allied with workers to lead a

revolution that toppled that country's dictator. A more egalitarian and democratic future briefly seemed possible, until foreign actors helped shut down these efforts, leading to a new civil war. Something similar took place in Algeria, when the country's then eighty-two-year-old president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, was forced from office.

The long-in-the-tooth leaders across the entire continent know this and are afraid. It is seen in the increasingly frequent attempts to shut off access to the internet or block social media in countries facing protest movements or during elections. It's the job of socialists to imbue these movements with a politics that offers solutions for workers of all generations. ◀

This is the stuff revolutions tend to be made of.



SENEGAL

The government, headed by President Macky Sall, banned the social media platform TikTok in a general crackdown on dissent that has included the dissolution of the main opposition party, the left-wing populist Patriots of Senegal, and the expulsion of its leader, Ousmane Sonko, from the country, as well as the violent repression of subsequent protests.

SUDAN

The escalation of the civil war between the Sudanese military and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces has turned the country's two largest cities — Khartoum, the capital, and its twin city of Omdurman, the main centers of the conflict that began in April — into ghost towns. Four million Sudanese have been displaced so far.

ZIMBABWE

The country held elections on August 23 amid widespread reports of escalating repression against Nelson Chamisa's opposition party, which faced President Emmerson Mnangagwa and his ruling ZANU-PF party. Mnangagwa officially won with 53% the vote, but election observers have questioned the legitimacy of the result.

SOLDIERS OF MISFORTUNE

Ahead of the second Russia-Africa summit in Moscow this July, Vladimir Putin struck the vapid anti-imperial pose he has often adopted since invading Ukraine. “We are sure that a new multipolar world order ... will be more just and democratic,” he said. “Africa ... will take its worthy place in it and finally free itself from the bitter legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism.”

Also at the meeting was one prominent architect of neocolonialism: Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of the Wagner Group, making his first public appearance in the two months between his coup attempt this June and his death in a plane crash this August. Over the past five years, Prigozhin has deployed an estimated 5,000 mercenaries in Africa. Based mainly in the Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, Mali, Sudan, and Mozambique, Wagner operatives promise security to the embattled leaders of Africa’s poorest and most unstable countries — but their real objective has seemingly been to build a multibillion-dollar resource extraction business, which now controls diamonds, timber, oil, and gold across the continent.

Take, for example, the Ndassima mine in CAR, which sits atop a gold deposit worth \$2.8 billion. Wagner secured the rights from President Faustin-Archange Touadéra as in-kind payment for aid in the civil war that has ravaged the country since 2012, nearly confining the government to the capital. In its mercenary capacity, Wagner reclaimed territory for Touadéra and massacred both rebels and civilians. Yet in its business capacity, it has actually paid former rebels to help expand the Ndassima gold mine, which now employs 300 locals, imports industrial equipment from Russia, and exports its products using a fleet of 15 planes.

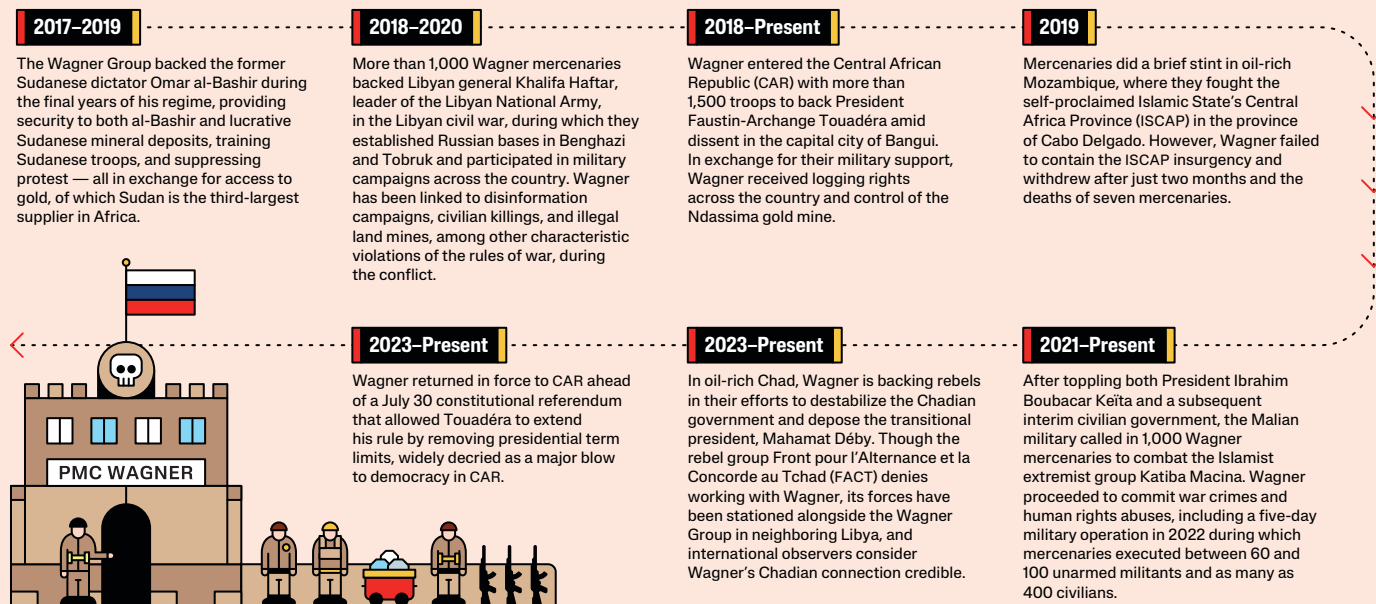
Wagner runs Ndassima through a shell company called Midas Ressources. Elsewhere in CAR, Wagner aliases including Diamville, Bois Rouge, and Lobaye Invest trade in diamonds, timber, and more gold. Money travels across the continent through similar Wagner fronts — from Marko Mining in Mali to CAPEX petroleum in Cameroon — and leaves it through a global network of up to 400 Prigozhin-linked businesses.

As the Sentry and other watchdogs have observed, this is a state-capture campaign. When Wagner accepts formerly rebel-controlled resources as compensation from cash-strapped authorities, the state only becomes more dependent on the mercenaries’ growing political and economic power. In CAR, Wagner operatives have inserted themselves as special advisers and praetorian guards to Touadéra, and the streets of the capital are lined with banners that read “Central African Republic walks hand in hand with Russia.”

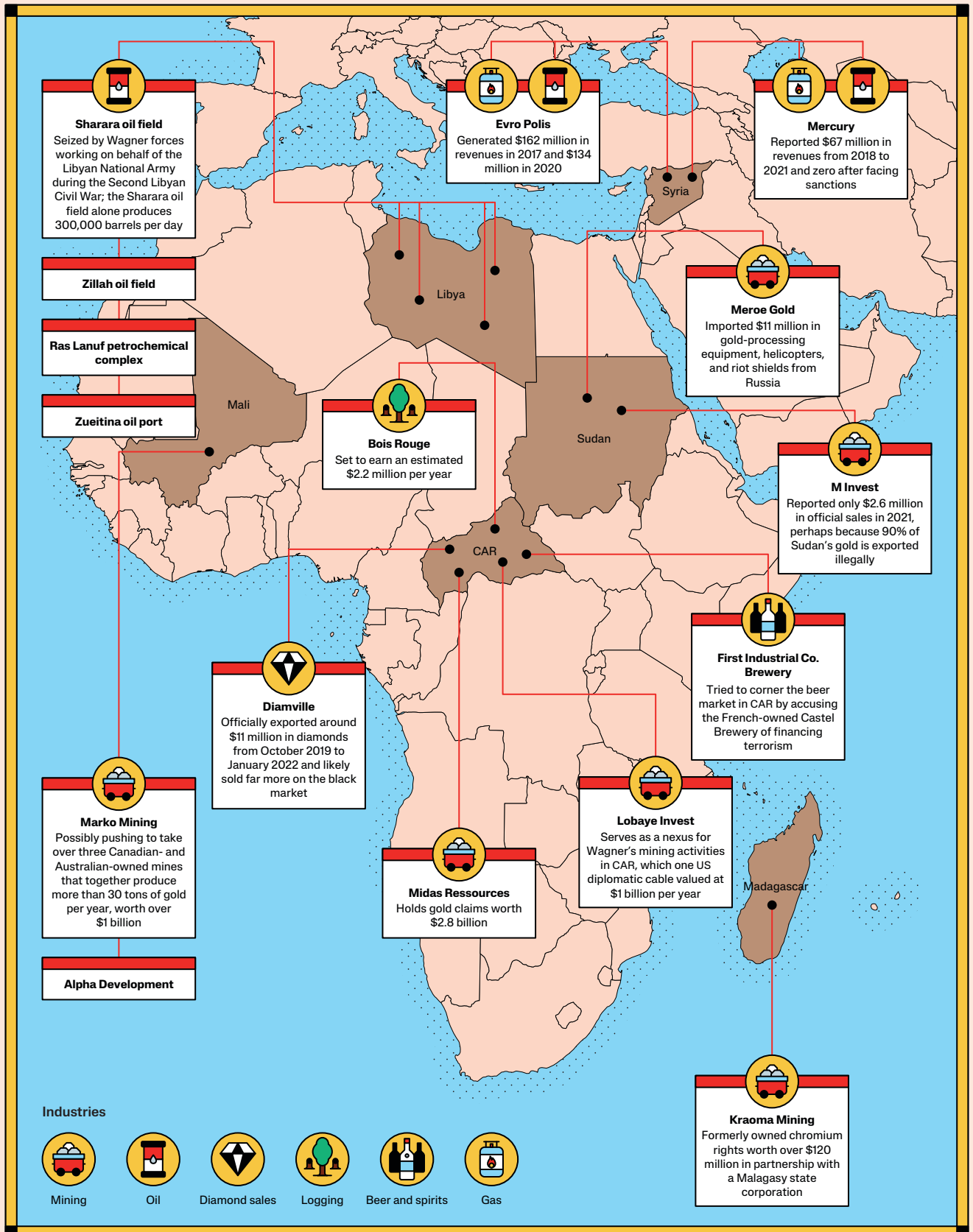
Prigozhin’s death is unlikely to halt Wagner’s expansion in Africa, since the mercenaries also hold leverage over the Russian state — sanctioned and overextended, it needs them as an unofficial foreign policy tool and a source of off-the-books revenue. In early August, after the coup in uranium-rich Niger, Prigozhin wrote on Telegram that “a thousand Wagner fighters” stood ready to help the plotters “restore order and destroy terrorists.” A few days later, the new junta became Wagner’s latest African client.

MERCENARIES IN AFRICA

Sources: Human Rights Watch, Council on Foreign Relations, Al Jazeera, Reuters, Wall Street Journal, Geopolitical Monitor, Guardian



GOLD, DIAMONDS, OIL, AND BOOZE



ASIA

In Summary

CAMBODIA

Prime Minister Hun Sen declared an expected victory for his conservative Cambodian People's Party — which has ruled since 1979, morphing from a Soviet-aligned communist party into a nationalist one — in a July general election that included no viable opposition after the liberal Candlelight Party was barred from participation. Hun Sen's son Hun Manet will succeed his father as prime minister after the former resigns following a 38-year reign later this year.



Cambodian
People's Party
(CPP)
96%

National United Front
for an Independent,
Neutral, Peaceful and
Cooperative Cambodia
(FUNCINPEC)
4%

NORTH KOREA

Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un announced plans for a major increase in missile production to build "overwhelming military power" in preparation for war. The announcement came just a few days before South Korea and the United States commenced their annual military drills.



JACOBIN.COM

August 29, 2023

**Sri Lanka Has a Proud Tradition
of Revolt Against Leaders Who
Trample on Its People**

JAPAN'S PLATINUM PLAN

BY MASASHI HOSHINO

The dystopian film *Plan 75* imagines a society in which the aged willingly commit mass euthanasia — but it can't imagine a society without class.

► **DURING AN ONLINE** discussion in December 2021, Yusuke Narita — a Yale assistant professor of economics who has somehow attained celebrity status in Japan — suggested that old people in Japan should consider committing mass suicide. His reasoning was that it would help alleviate the country's financial difficulties.

When the *New York Times* covered this story in February 2023, Narita drew severe criticism from an international audience. He later made an excuse that his words were merely "metaphors," but around the same time, in Japan's Kanto region, there were a series of robberies targeting the elderly that resulted in the

death of a seventy-year-old woman in West Tokyo. It was only the latest attack in a growing trend. Despite its overall low crime rate, Japan has recently seen an uptick in hate crimes against the elderly and other vulnerable groups. In 2016, a former staff member killed nineteen patients in a care home for disabled people in Sagami-hara, near Tokyo. At the trial, the assailant explained that he hoped to reduce the burden on society by eliminating those who live on public money.

This hatred toward the vulnerable derives from a greater anxiety over Japan's economic stagnation and low birth rate. The predicament has incited an obsession with "productivity" among policymakers —

INDIA

In August, Prime Minister Narendra Modi survived a no-confidence vote demanded by the opposition in response to severe ethnic violence in Manipur, which is governed by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party.

AZERBAIJAN

The Azerbaijani blockade of the Nagorno-Karabakh region continues to obstruct the delivery of basic necessities to 120,000 ethnic Armenians — what a former chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court is now calling a genocidal act.

August 21, 2023

Imran Khan's Ouster Is a Story of US Power and Propaganda

August 8, 2023

The West's Double Standards in the Armenian Crisis

July 29, 2023

NATO's Expansion Into Asia Is the Mother of Bad Ideas

July 16, 2023

Narendra Modi Is Using Brutal Repression to Silence the People of Kashmir

and public scorn for those “producing” neither wealth nor babies. In 2018, Liberal Democratic Party lawmaker Mio Sugita stated that the LGBTQ community was “unproductive” and therefore not worth public support.

Yet the idea of getting rid of the elderly to make room for the young has a long historical root in the Japanese imagination. Since the medieval period, the mythical *Ubasute-yama*, a poor, mountainous village where people dump their “useless” parents to feed the young, has been a familiar theme in Japanese culture. It’s an enduring myth to this day. In Shohei Imamura’s 1983 film *The Ballad of Narayama*, the protagonist’s sixty-nine-year-old mother destroys her own healthy teeth with a stone to make herself appear “useless” and therefore expendable. The sinister implication is that you should not only accept your fate when your time is up but also willingly sacrifice yourself — the idea echoed and amplified in Narita’s phrase: “mass *seppuku*.”

In an age of austerity, it is striking how well the traditional Japanese morality of self-sacrifice fits the neoliberal



A poster for *Plan 75* (2022) depicts one of the film's ill-fated senior citizens.

idea of personal responsibility. Chie Hayakawa’s 2022 film *Plan 75* imagines a near future in which the entire Japanese society is systematically turned into *Ubasute-yama*. The film opens with a scene of mass murder at an elderly care home, clearly referring to the Sagami-hara killing. Over piano music, the attacker recites his manifesto for the audience: “Throughout history, the Japanese considered dying for the country as something to be proud of. I sincerely hope my brave action will trigger an honest debate that will bring a brighter future to this

country.” We then find out that the government has just passed a law for the eponymous plan that allows those over seventy-five to choose euthanasia.

Although the debate over a graying society often centers on the division between the young and the old, *Plan 75* highlights the significance of class. As of 2018, Japan has a relatively high poverty rate of 20 percent among people over the age of sixty-five, ranking tenth out of thirty-eight OECD countries. This has given birth to the term “*karyu-rojin*,” or “lower-class elderly.” Michi, the seventy-eight-year-old protagonist of *Plan 75*, falls into this category. Living alone in a municipal apartment, she decides to end her life prematurely after losing her job as a hotel cleaner. It is easy to imagine that *karyu-rojin* like her would disproportionately sacrifice their lives under such a program. Though the film mentions the “Platinum Plan,” in which wealthy customers can spend their last days in a luxury spa resort complete with a beauty salon and a studio where they can take a “farewell photo” with family,

not many in such a comfortable position would choose an untimely death.

Plan 75 also satirizes how capitalism generates growth at the expense of human lives. While the government in the film refuses to support vulnerable people, they happily squander money on creating a whole new bureaucracy, including PR offices and call centers, to administer the plan. We hear a TV broadcaster saying that the plan has brought about various kinds of new private businesses — including body-disposal subcontractors — producing an estimated economic impact of one trillion yen, thereby creating “a bright prospect of the future of Japan.”

This isn’t to say that concerns about a rapidly graying population should be dismissed entirely. With the highest average age of cabinet members among OECD countries, it’s a democratic issue that Japan must address. But Narita’s idea that only mass suicide can restore true democracy to Japan is nothing more than a sick fantasy, no matter how many neoliberals might quietly agree. ◀

PAKISTAN

The Election Commission announced that former prime minister Imran Khan would be banned from politics for five years. Just days earlier, Khan had been sentenced to three years’ imprisonment on corruption charges. He and his allies are set to challenge both verdicts in the coming months.

NEW ZEALAND

A poll indicated that the center-right New Zealand National Party and the right-wing libertarian ACT New Zealand currently have enough support to form a coalition government in the upcoming October election — the latest sign of trouble for former prime minister Jacinda Ardern’s center-left New Zealand Labour Party.

THAILAND

After months of political gridlock, the center-right Pheu Thai Party announced plans to form a coalition government with the outgoing military-backed government. Though the progressive Move Forward Party holds the most seats in the National Assembly, it has been prevented from forming its own government by congressional conservatives.

DOWNWARD SLOPE

After decades of rapid growth, the population of China is on the decline.

With a birth rate once so great that, in 1979, the Chinese government implemented a controversial “one-child policy” — enforced with fees that pushed many second and third children of poor families into a shadowy, extralegal existence — the world power now faces the opposite problem: so great a downturn in births that the population no longer reproduces itself. By 2040, nearly one-third of the Chinese population will have reached retirement age.

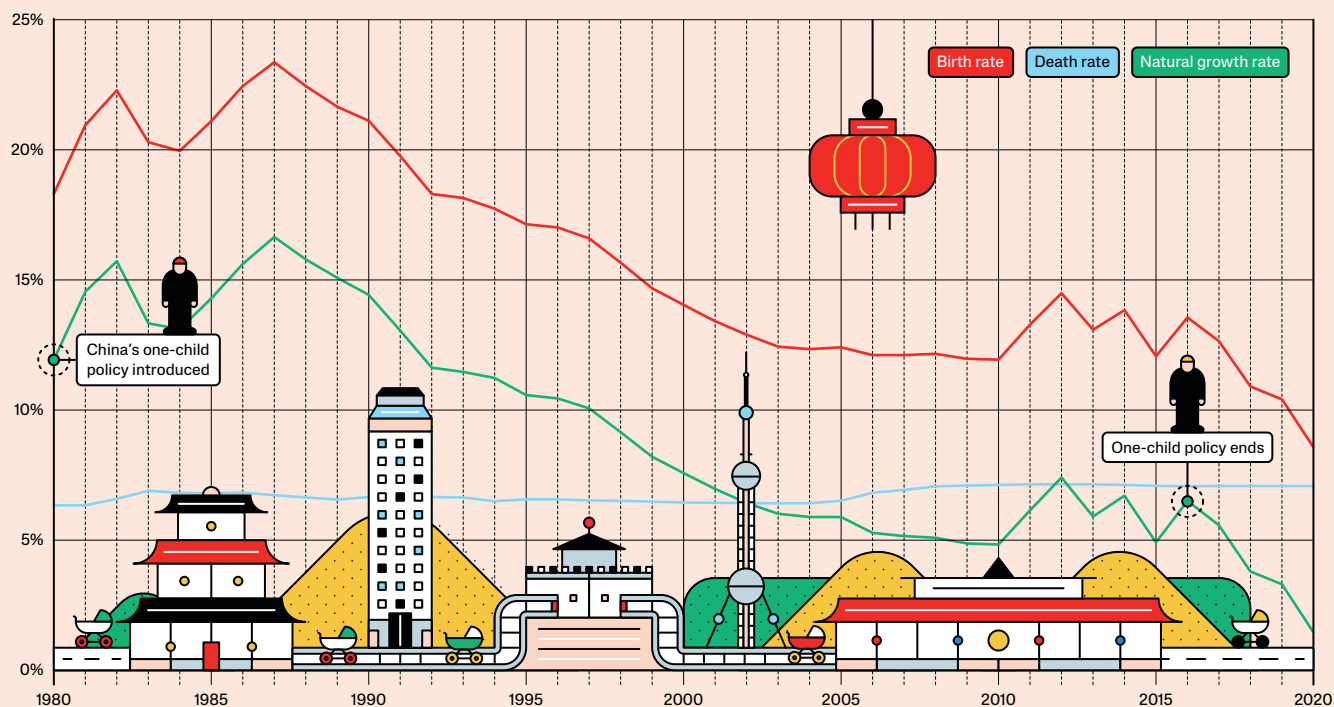
Government efforts to stave off the shift have been too little, too late: the one-child policy was upped to a two-child policy in 2015, then a three-child policy in 2021 — but the financial incentives offered by the government are not enough to cover the expenses of large families in a country increasingly plagued by wage stagnation, endemic overwork, and limited opportunities (whether through higher education or workplace advancement) to improve one’s financial standing.

Neighboring Japan, the classic example of demographic transition, demonstrates one potential future for the Chinese economy: as a manufacturing country becomes increasingly elderly, its productive output plateaus. The Japanese economic boom of the 1990s waned as its population aged out of the workforce.

South Korea remains the only country in the world with a birth rate of less than one child per woman, clocking in at 0.78 — but China is not far behind, with a mere 1.28. Due in large part to these shifts, pension funds are set to run out in South Korea by 2055; already in China, the government has begun to slash medical benefits for seniors and consider a hike in the current retirement age of 60.

CHINESE POPULATION GROWTH RATE

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, *Nature*



VANUATU

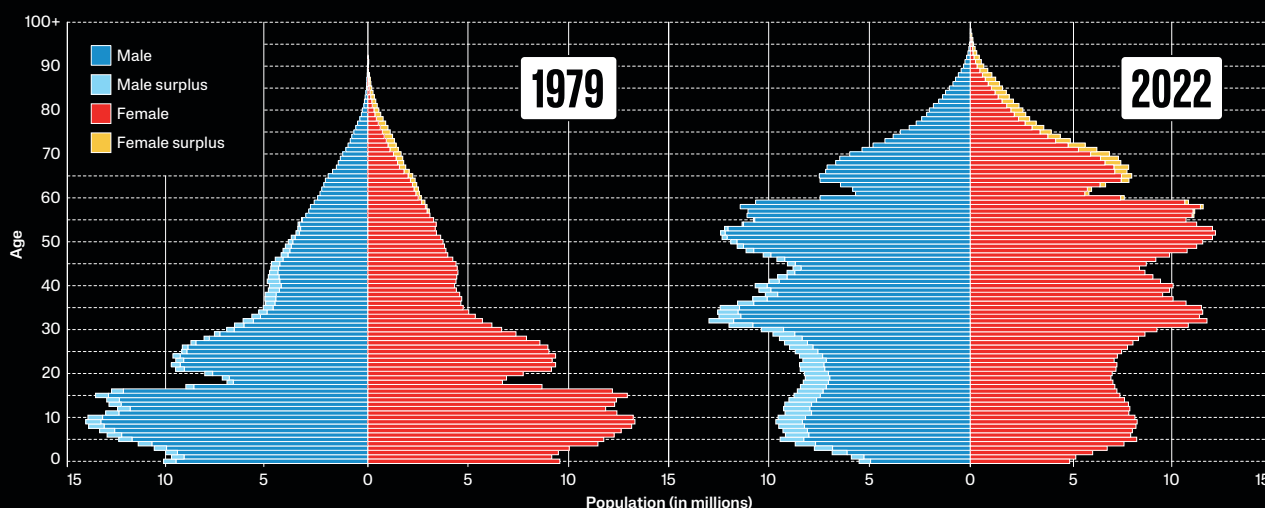
Prime Minister Alatoi Ishmael Kalsakau of the liberal Union of Moderate Parties narrowly survived a no-confidence vote demanded by the center-left opposition, Vanua'aku Pati, helmed by former prime minister Bob Loughman, after Kalsakau entered Vanuatu — one of many Pacific Island nations caught between China and the West — into a defense pact with Australia.

MYANMAR

The military junta granted amnesty to 7,000 prisoners in Myanmar and pardoned former leader Aung San Suu Kyi on five of the 19 charges for which she is serving a 33-year (now 27-year) sentence. The junta also officially postponed an election they had promised at the time of Suu Kyi's overthrow and extended the state of emergency in Myanmar by six months.

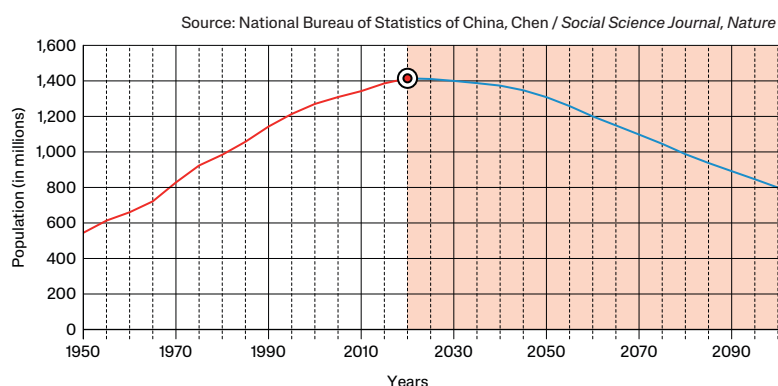
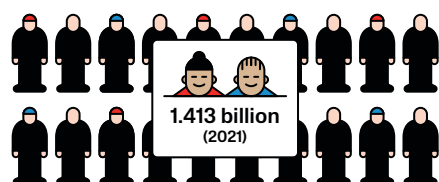
Source: PopulationPyramid.net

DEMOGRAPHICS OVER TIME

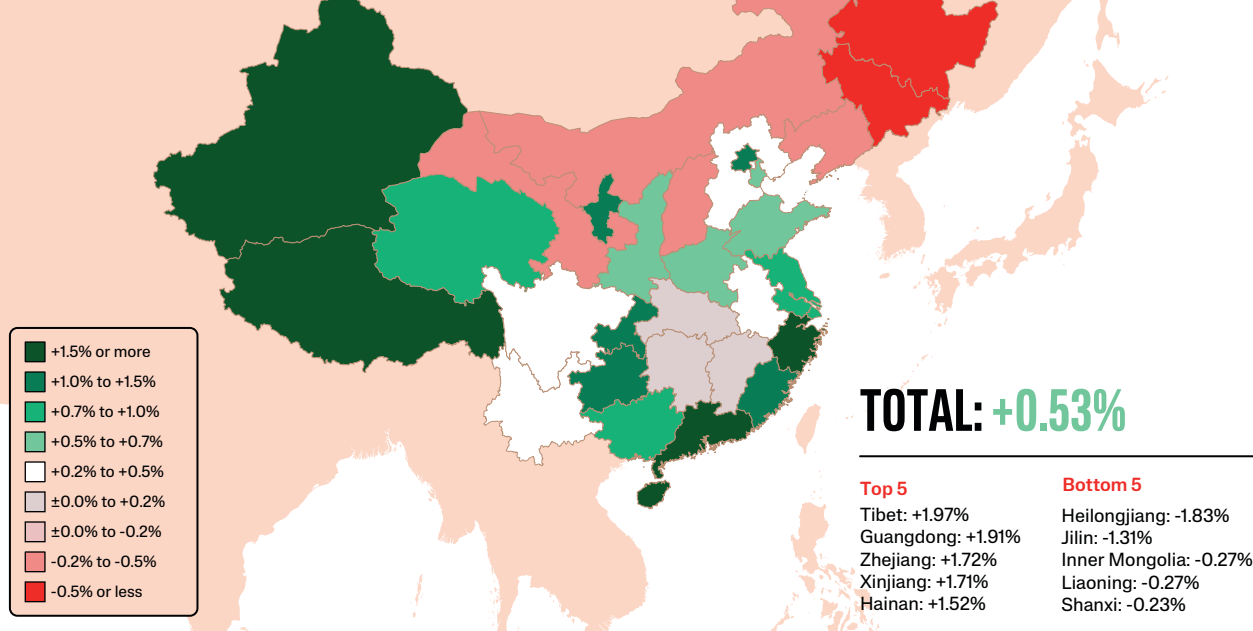


CHINESE POPULATION PEAK

One demographer suggests that China's population peaked in 2021, while others forecast it will take place in the next two years.



POPULATION CHANGE BY PROVINCE 2010–2020



Source: 2010 and 2020 National Population Censuses of the People's Republic of China

ILLUSTRATION BY MARCO MICCICHÈ

AGING



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HOW DO YOU DO, FELLOW KIDS?

Around the world, politicians of all persuasions have one thing in common: their cringeworthy attempts to appeal to the youths.

INDONESIAN SOLIDARITY PARTY

This year, Partai Solidaritas Indonesia (PSI) attempted to court young voters via a Twitter/X giveaway of tickets to see the K-pop band Blackpink on their “Born Pink” tour, which passed through Jakarta in March 2023. In order to be eligible for the raffle, contenders had to take a photo of themselves wearing Blackpink merchandise in front of a billboard displaying an image of Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto — a former general implicated in numerous human rights violations in East Timor.

MEMBERS OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

In 2018, six MEPs from across the political spectrum took part in an event called “Battle 4 Your Vote” in Strasbourg, France, in which professional freelance rappers were enlisted to hash out ideological differences in song. At one point, the Greens’ Karima Delli bobs her head along to MC Angel spitting the following bars: “We be getting bombed by ISIS / when we’re divided / United we’re stronger / this can’t be ignored any longer.” Later, Dita Charanzová, VP of the European Parliament, took a turn: “Speak up, speak out / Youth, we want to hear your views, / we want to hear it loud / We are standing for Europe, / for that we are proud.”

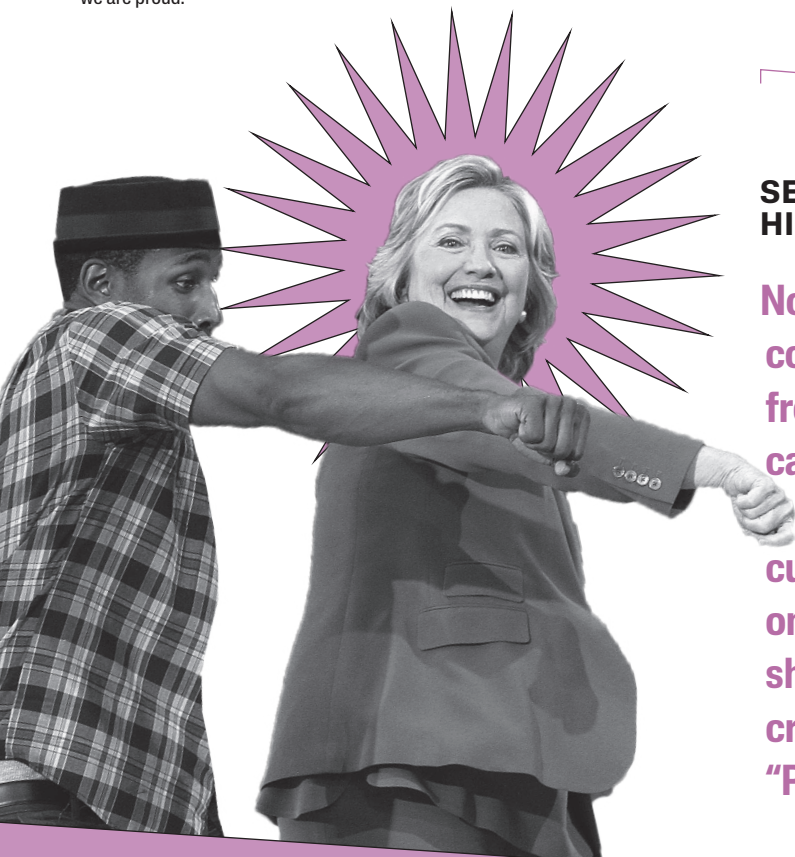


VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS

To celebrate World Space Week in 2021, Kamala Harris, who also serves as chairwoman of the National Space Council, appeared in a video titled “Get Curious with Vice President Kamala Harris,” where five children interview Harris about space exploration. “I just love the idea of exploring the unknown,” says Harris, while the children smile and nod. “There [are] ... things that we just haven’t figured out or discovered yet!... To think of so much that’s out there that we still have to learn — like, I love that.” As it turns out, the children in the video were professional actors who had, in fact, gone through rigorous auditions to secure their spots in the commercial.

ITALIAN PRIME MINISTER SILVIO BERLUSCONI

Silvio Berlusconi joined TikTok to support his protégée Giorgia Meloni during her 2022 campaign for the Italian prime ministership. In his first video, he declares, “I’m reaching out to everyone over the age of 18 — is it to ask you to introduce me to your girlfriends? As if! Instead, I want to ask you to go out and vote, and to vote for Forza Italia.” Berlusconi was previously investigated in a teenage prostitution case.



SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON

No list of political cringe would be complete without some highlights from Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential campaign. In January, her appearance on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* culminated with Clinton “dabbing” on daytime television. Later that year, she drew ire for suggesting the creation of an app-based game called “Pokémon Go to the polls.”

MARYLAND GOVERNOR MARTIN O'MALLEY

During his 2016 presidential campaign, Martin O'Malley made an appearance on *The View* with an acoustic guitar, proceeding to (poorly) sing Taylor Swift's "Bad Blood." He credited his song choice to the news that Katy Perry was performing a benefit concert for his opponent Hillary Clinton.



FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA

In 2016, Michelle Obama appeared in a CollegeHumor music video called "Go to College," in which she raps around the White House alongside *SNL*'s Jay Pharoah, "If you wanna fly jets, / you should go to college / Reach high and cash checks, / fill your head with knowledge." Then she actually solos: "South Side, Chicago / We all know / We had to do overtime every night / to make it tomorrow / And everyone could really make their dream true / Hey, kid, listenin' in Michigan, / that could be you!" Comments for the video on YouTube have been permanently disabled.

NEW ZEALAND PRIME MINISTER JOHN KEY

John Key made the news a number of times during his eight-year stint as prime minister of New Zealand, not infrequently with headlines like, "Did John Key kill [meme or fad]?" Classic examples include a viral 2011 image of Key's son, Max, planking while Key smiles awkwardly in the background and a viral video of Key performing the "Gangnam Style" dance at the Edge radio station in 2012.

ALAN KELLY, IRISH LABOUR PARTY LEADER

In 2009, Alan Kelly conscripted the rapper GMCBeats to produce a song for his Labour campaign for European Parliament, which featured a number of unforgettable lines, including "Fianna Fáil; no fada, spells Fianna fail" and "His opinion isn't outdated like lino in kitchens / and women like to say he looks like [Irish rugby player] Brian O'Driscoll." The chorus, sung in GMC's heavy Cork accent, encourages listeners to "Vote Alan Kelly!" Though the song disappeared from the internet in 2015, fans and trolls managed to dredge it back up the following year from wherever cringe goes to die.

SEN. MITT ROMNEY (R-UT)

At a 2008 Martin Luther King Jr Day parade in Jacksonville, Florida, then presidential candidate Mitt Romney — who infamously embarked on a 12-hour road trip in 1983 with his Irish Setter, Seamus, strapped to the roof of his station wagon — assembled a group of black teenagers for a photograph and then inexplicably barked the words to the circa-2000 hit Baha Men song "Who Let the Dogs Out" instead of saying something normal, like, you know, "Cheese!"

2008 US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

The three top contenders for president in 2008 — Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John McCain — appeared in a message broadcast by World Wrestling Entertainment during *Monday Night Raw*, which Clinton opens by saying, "In honor of the WWE, you can call me Hill-Rod." McCain asks, "Whatcha gonna do when John McCain and all his McCainiacs run wild on you?... I'm gonna introduce Osama bin Laden to the Undertaker," and Obama pronounces, "To the special interests who have been setting the agenda in Washington for too long, I've got one question: Do you smell what Barack is cooking?"

Dems Hall of Shame

With friends like these, who needs enemies?



1

House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY)

Despite enormous domestic unrest in Israel — prompted by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's proposed judicial reform, which would enhance the powers of his increasingly oppressive executive branch — Jeffries and other Democrats embarked on an AIPAC-sponsored trip to the turbulent Middle Eastern country, during which Jeffries met with Netanyahu, defended US military aid to Israel, and, when asked about settler-colonial violence in the West Bank, claimed that Netanyahu had made it "clear ... that he doesn't condone violence, no matter where it originates." At what point does one stop taking a would-be authoritarian's words in good faith?

2

New York City mayor Eric Adams

The controversial New York mayor turned his ire on an 84-year-old tenant activist when, at a town hall, she frustratedly asked him why his hand-picked Rent Guidelines Board had voted in favor of a 2%-to-7% rent increase for rent-stabilized apartments. "Don't be disrespectful to me," Adams said. "I'm the mayor of this city.... Treat me with the respect that I deserve to be treated [with].... Give me the respect I deserve.... I walked into this room as a grown man, and I'm gonna walk out of this room as a grown man," he continued, accusing his interlocutor, a Holocaust survivor who has spent decades advocating for low-income New Yorkers, of speaking to him like "someone that's on the plantation that you own."

FAIR-WEATHER FRIENDS

BY BRANKO MARCETIC

Social security is once again a third rail of American politics. History tells us that might not last for long.

Is there anything in American life as simultaneously beloved and embattled as Social Security? From the moment it became the proverbial third rail of US politics, it seems like politicians can't help but stab and jab at the program, even at the risk of their own political deaths.

JOE BIDEN IS THE FIRST PRESIDENT IN NEARLY FIFTY YEARS NOT TO SO MUCH AS ATTEMPT TO DILUTE SOCIAL SECURITY.

Even stranger, for the past half century the ones doing the prodding have often been from the very Democratic Party that counts Social Security's passage as part of its triumphant legacy.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law in 1935, the United States was the only major industrialized country not to have a public pension system to take care of its elderly. A substantial share of pre-Depression Americans — unless they were wealthy,

had family to care for them, or got a philanthropic handout — spent their golden years in poorhouses, panhandling on the street, or surviving through bitter poverty at a rate that plummeted from 50 percent in 1935 to 35 percent twenty-four years later, before falling below 10 percent by century's end.

Though the conservative campaign against Social Security never stopped, it was a consistent political loser. Far from being rolled back, the program would be expanded again and again over the decades, including under Republican presidents, like Richard Nixon, who understood that their political lives depended on it. As Dwight D. Eisenhower, who oversaw an expansion of Social Security, explained to his brother in 1954, "should any political party attempt to abolish Social Security" and other New Deal programs, "you would not hear of that party again in our political history."

3

Former president Barack Obama

Obama has spent the hottest summer in history lamenting climate inaction, despite the fact that, during his eight-year administration, he was the largest recipient of money from BP — infamous for hemorrhaging 210 million gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 — and the BP PAC in decades. His spokesperson at the time blatantly denied it, claiming that “President Obama didn’t accept a dime from corporate PACs or federal lobbyists during his presidential campaign,” but the numbers speak for themselves: hundreds of thousands of dollars from executives at BP, ExxonMobil, Exelon, and other behemoths of the energy sector. “That was me, people,” he once said of record-high US oil and gas production.

4

President Joe Biden

The president proceeded with a ten-day vacation while lethal fires raged through Maui, Hawaii, killing more than 114 people — the highest death toll associated with any fire in America since 1918 — and injuring and displacing thousands of others. It took him nearly two weeks to declare an intention to visit the ravaged island while FEMA’s emergency coffers ran low, with an additional \$12 billion in federal disaster relief funding hitched to a controversial budget that would allocate twice that amount to Ukraine. Not only did Biden not walk the walk, but he didn’t talk the talk either: when asked by reporters at Rehoboth Beach in Delaware about the rising death toll in Hawaii, Biden’s response was a succinct “No comment.”

5

Rep. Katie Porter (D-CA)

While Porter has been quick to criticize big banks amid a campaign to replace Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), she has kept largely mum about one particularly personal relationship with the finance sector. In 2015, she served as a consultant to Ocwen Financial Corporation, a mortgage loan provider in the midst of paying \$2 billion in reparations for deception and other misconduct between 2009 and 2012. Despite being, in the words of *Politico*, “an official who is known for her candor,” Porter has repeatedly declined to comment on the work she did for the disgraced Ocwen — which, during her first congressional campaign in 2017, she took great pains to eradicate from her record.

Decades later, some Democrats decided to treat this warning as a challenge. As the United States became mired in the bog of stagflation in the 1970s, Jimmy Carter put Eisenhower’s words to the test, pushing for a set of amendments that partly cut back Social Security benefits for future retirees, before putting tighter restrictions on disability benefits, which he also trimmed.

None of this stopped Carter from presenting himself as Social Security’s guardian angel when Ronald Reagan challenged him in 1980, accurately pointing to the conservative icon’s long-standing zeal for making it voluntary. It kicked off a tradition of Democrats alternating between going along with GOP assaults on the program (or even lining it up in their own crosshairs) and brandishing the prospect of Republican cuts as a political weapon come election time.

And what a weapon it was. When “entitlement reform” became the name of the game under Reagan, Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill, a Democrat, seized on the Gipper’s planned benefit cuts in 1981 to assail the administration (“It is a rotten thing to do. It is a despicable thing”), and Democrats later made electoral hay out of the GOP’s 1985 push to



freeze the cost-of-living adjustment. But Republican plans withered away after an outpouring of national working-class anger, which Democrats rode to major victories in 1982 and 1986, taking back control of Congress — even though O'Neill himself had worked with Reagan to raise the retirement age in 1983, a measure that more congressional Democrats voted *for* than *against*.

But the Democrats' shift from Social Security's champions to — at best — fair-weather friends was perhaps best embodied in the career of a young politician from Delaware. Having run and won his first Senate campaign in 1972 calling for automatic cost-of-living increases to the program, by 1984 Joe Biden was spearheading a more aggressive budget freeze than even the GOP had, partly by eliminating scheduled Social Security benefit hikes.

By the Bill Clinton years, the corporatist Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) was in ascendance, a group that had once backed a failed 1990 Democratic push to plug the deficit by cutting Social Security payroll taxes — the linchpin of the program's fiscal solvency. By this time, the threat of Republican Social Security cuts had become a less effective political cudgel and was unable to prevent the GOP's historic 1994 midterm rout, partly because a memo leaked shortly before the vote proving that Clinton's White House was weighing cuts of its own.

Democrats flipped back and forth through the 1990s on support for a balanced budget constitutional amendment, which would have mandated steep cuts to countless safety net programs, including Social Security. Though Democratic enthusiasm for the measure petered out in the second half of the decade, its 1995 iteration was cosponsored by liberal icon Senator Paul Simon and came just two votes shy of being enacted.

**MUCH AS ONLY NIXON
COULD GO TO CHINA, IN
MANY WAYS ONLY A DEM-
OCRAT COULD DEMOLISH
SOCIAL SECURITY.**

Undeterred, Clinton began laying the groundwork for an all-out assault on the program, even as his own pollsters found that nearly two-thirds of Americans considered protecting Social Security and Medicare their top priority. "It will take the political system a while to swallow any kind of Social Security reform," Bruce Reed, his director of domestic policy (and current White House deputy chief of staff for policy), reasoned in 1997. "That doesn't mean we couldn't get off to a good start." Clinton started "educating" the public about the program's fiscal difficulties and how it needed saving, even suggesting investing Social Security funds in the stock market.

Invoking the memory of Robert F. Kennedy, Clinton told a 1998 DLC meeting that "we have space now, and confidence, and a sense of possibility. And we cannot squander it" — by which he meant it was time to use the nation's moment of peace and prosperity to do the courageous work of restructuring Social Security. The only thing that stopped Clinton's backroom dealing with his archnemesis Newt Gingrich, which would have involved implementing GOP proposals for privately funded accounts and ramming the legislation through a lame-duck Congress, was the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

Democrats soon rediscovered their passion for Social Security all over again when it was George W. Bush's turn to try and privatize it, after they'd spent four years unable to find a decent rallying cry against their opponents. It was "the most unifying issue you can imagine," said Senator Dick Durbin, and "a way to engage in a debate that Republicans will lose and lose and lose," one party official giddily remarked. "I think the feeling among Democrats is we've been handed a gift," said Senator Chuck Schumer.

**THE ONLY THING THAT
STOPPED CLINTON'S
BACKROOM DEALING WITH
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SCANDAL.**




Then, with Bush's attempt beaten back and Barack Obama now in the White House, the party once again ping-ponged back to taking aim at the program, with the president-elect promising the *Washington Post* before he was even sworn in that he'd "spend some political capital" on doing what Clinton had failed to do. Somehow the program survived six years of austerity, grand bargains, and fiscal cliff negotiations, with Obama reportedly closest to inking a deal with Republicans on benefit cuts right after the 2012 election campaign he'd spent assailing GOP nominee Mitt Romney as a poor-hating plutocrat bent on dismantling Social Security. Sensing a shift in the political winds, one brought about in large part thanks to left-wing organizing in his second term, Obama ended his presidency calling for Social Security benefits to be expanded.

All of this brings us to the present moment, when, against all odds, Joe Biden — arguably one of Social Security's most fervid Democratic menaces these past forty years — is, so far, the first president from either party in nearly fifty years not to so much as attempt to dilute the program. Biden called out the GOP for wanting to make cuts in his 2023 State of the Union speech, and the debt-ceiling deal he struck the same year left it untouched. That Biden repeatedly put Social Security on the chopping block when he was Obama's vice president, and that he said as recently as 2018 that "we need to do something" about it, makes this all the more surprising.

Other than pointing to the rank cynicism and fecklessness of the Democratic Party, what does this largely depressing history tell us? Much as only Nixon could go to China, in many ways only a Democrat could demolish Social Security. The fact that both Biden and the GOP now seem to view doing so as a political liability suggests that, after a long period in the wilderness, Social Security's "third rail" status may truly be restored. ■

ON FRIENDS, FOES, AND THE THIN LINE BETWEEN THEM

Our friends know we spy on them. They have to demonstrate some outrage, but I don't think people [are] super shocked.... Friends spy on friends!¹ So Ukraine is a country in Europe. It exists next to another country called Russia.

Russia is a bigger country. Russia is a powerful country. Russia decided to invade a smaller country called Ukraine. So basically, that's wrong, and it goes against everything we stand for.²  If anybody told you ... that we'd be able to bring all of Europe together in the onslaught on Iraq and get NATO to be completely united, I think they would have told you it's not likely.³ It's hard to tell, but [Putin's] clearly losing the war in Iraq, losing the war at home. And he has become a bit of a pariah around the world.⁴ [He] may circle Kyiv with tanks, but he will never gain the hearts and souls of the Iranian people.⁵  Frankly, I think closing [the Russian] embassy in the United States, kicking every Russian student out of the United States — those should all be on the table, and Putin needs to know that every day that he is in Ukraine, there are more severe options that could come.⁶ The countless hours I have spent in the investigation of Russian election interference and the impeachment inquiry have rendered my soul weary.... It is time for me to retire.⁷  I guess we will have to cancel our August family trip to Moscow.⁸

1

Anonymous Department of State official, *Puck* interview, April 18, 2023.

2

Vice President Kamala Harris on *The Morning Hustle*, March 1, 2022.

3

President Joe Biden, fundraising event in Chevy Chase, Maryland, June 27, 2023.

4

President Joe Biden, conversation with reporters, June 28, 2023.

5

President Joe Biden, State of the Union address, March 1, 2022.

6

Rep. Eric Swalwell (D-CA), CNN interview, February 24, 2022.

7

Former congressman Denny Heck (D-WA), Medium post, December 4, 2019.

8

Jen Psaki, former White House communications director, Twitter/X, May 21, 2022.

GOP Hall of Shame

Another roundup of unnecessary evils.



1

Governor Ron DeSantis (R-FL)

The presidential candidate has continued to stand by a controversial new social studies curriculum for sixth through eighth graders in Florida, to include lessons on “how slaves developed skills [like agricultural labor] which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit.” DeSantis defended the standards on NBC, clarifying that enslaved people “developed skills in spite of slavery, not because of slavery ... showing resourcefulness and then using those skills once slavery ended” — meaning, presumably, in the Reconstruction-era South, where most formerly enslaved people were forced to continue working the land of their previous owners under the brutal sharecropping system.

2

House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party

In July, the House committee on the Communist Party of China — founded by House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) but featuring anti-China hawks from both sides of the aisle — launched a Red Scare-style inquisition of UC Berkeley on the suspicion that university researchers affiliated with the Tsinghua-Berkeley Shenzhen Institute, a nearly decade-old research partnership, have been sharing technologies with the Chinese government that could give the country military and economic advantages. From one McCarthyism to another — at this point, can we call it nominative determinism?

MARINE LE PEN'S PENSION TIGHTROPE ACT

BY MARLON ETTINGER

Far-right leader Marine Le Pen has often claimed to defend France's welfare state from liberals. But as millions struck against Emmanuel Macron's retirement reform, Le Pen wasn't with the protesters.

A common saying in France is “Truth arises from a conflict of opinions.” This year, the country found multiple sources of conflict crystallized in the fight against pension reform. The change, which was eventually railroaded through parliament and came into effect on September 1, raised the retirement age from sixty-two to sixty-four and will require workers to make forty-three years of contributions before they have the right to a full pension. Opposition to the law sparked massive social unrest.

Surveys said that 65 percent of France thought the government should withdraw the measure, and 81 percent of people under thirty-five were opposed to it. In the early months of 2023, millions marched in the streets, with the country's two largest trade unions, the Confédération générale du travail (CGT) and the Confédération française démocra-

tique du travail (CFDT), creating an alliance not seen for over a decade. All opposition parties, too, criticized the policy one way or another — some cautiously, others with bombast; some from the left, others from the right.

In the National Assembly, the strongest opposition to the passage of the bill came from the New Ecological and Social People's Union (NUPES), the left-wing coalition led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon. MPs from his party, La France Insoumise (LFI), the largest member of the NUPES coalition, waged the fiercest battle against the bill, introducing a blizzard of thirteen thousand amendments to prevent a vote on the seventh article, which raises the retirement age to sixty-four. They also presented their own counter-

LE PEN'S PLAN FOR THE PENSION SYSTEM INCLUDES ESTABLISHING A “PRIORITY FOR NATIONALS” IN ALL SOCIAL WELFARE FUNDING.

3

President Donald Trump

Despite an explicit warning from a judge that he should refrain from making “inflammatory statements,” the former president took to Truth Social to complain about his latest court appearance. “She obviously wants me behind bars,” Trump said of the judge, “VERY BIASED & UNFAIR.” He also used the social media platform to announce his intention not to participate in the first debate of the Republican primary: “Many people are asking whether or not I will be doing the DEBATES? ALL AMERICANS have been clamoring for a President of extremely High Intelligence,” he proclaimed. “People know my Record, one of the BEST EVER, so why would I Debate?” That record, for the record, now includes four criminal investigations and four indictments.

4

The Supreme Court

While Americans were distracted by the executive and legislative circuses, the judicial branch has been hard at work eroding the separation between church and state by dismantling what is known as the “establishment clause.” Thanks to *Carson v. Makin* (2022), the Supreme Court may soon permit an Oklahoma charter school under the purview of the Catholic Church, the St Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School, to continue accessing public funds despite the fact that students who express same-sex attraction, interest in gender transition, or any disagreement with Catholic doctrine will be “choosing not to remain enrolled” — a tasteful euphemism for being expelled.

5

@GOP on Twitter/X

The Republican Party’s official Twitter/X account celebrated the Fourth of July by sharing a photograph of two waving flags accompanied by the caption “247 years ago, our forefathers told O! King George to get lost! Happy Independence Day from the GOP!” However, the flag depicted in the image was not, in fact, the American flag but the *Liberian* flag, which features six red stripes, five white stripes, and a single white star, compared to the Star-Spangled Banner, which contains seven red stripes, six white stripes, and fifty white stars. We have to ask: How many Republican politicians would it take to pass the civics portion of a US naturalization test?



bill that would lower the retirement age to sixty, with forty years of contributions for a full pension and a minimum full pension payment of €1,600 a month.

Rather different was the approach taken by the force often cast as the main opposition to Macron — Marine Le Pen’s far-right Rassemblement National (RN). Even in criticizing his government’s approach, it has shown the hollowness of its supposed “social” agenda.

LE PEN’S RETIRING OPPOSITION

Le Pen has, in fact, long supported a retirement age of sixty with forty years of contributions. This has placed her at odds with the rest of the RN, including her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who supported a retirement age of sixty-five during his 2007 presidential campaign.

This “social turn” was explained by Jean-Marie in 2012. “I think that if Marine Le Pen has taken this decision, it’s because she seriously thinks it’s useful for workers and the country,” he said. It was part of a long process of sanitizing her image, notes TF1 INFO, “notably by the development of social reform propositions [aimed at] workers and the popular classes of the country.”

But in 2022, when Marine Le Pen came closer to the presidency than ever be-

fore, her policy changed. Now retirement at sixty with forty years of contributions would only be possible for workers who started working before the age of twenty. As for the rest, she proposed retirement at between sixty-two and sixty-seven years, after forty or forty-three years of contributions.

This more ambiguous positioning allows Le Pen to oppose Macron's reform as it's written, all the while inching away from a policy of universal retirement at sixty with forty years of contributions.

In the National Assembly, her party has sought to paint itself as the sole opposition to Macron's project. This is helped by the mainstream right-wing party Les Républicains (LR), which is broadly in favor of raising the retirement age.

Macron's justification for the pension reform is based on the claim that France's system is in urgent need of restructuring before it becomes financially untenable. He's backed by a chorus in LR, whose leading members are on the record supporting retirement at sixty-five, and who call Macron's plan "indispensable," with opposition to it "irresponsible." The far-right presidential candidate Éric Zemmour, who competed with Le Pen for the reactionary vote in 2022, also supports raising the retirement age to sixty-five. It's the only way, he says, to restore the value of labor.

Zemmour's attacks on opponents of the reform echoed those of Macron's interior minister, Gérald Darmanin. At the end of January, Darmanin attacked Mélenchon and the entire Left's opposition to the retirement reform as a symptom of their defense of a "leftist, bobo idea of a society without work, without effort."

NO ENEMIES

Le Pen, then, is trying to position herself as a defender of France's working classes, contra LR's traditional right. And with her attacks on LFI and the wider Left's parliamentary opposition to the bill, she's also claiming to step in for a Left that supposedly abandoned them.

FRANCE FACED THE ALTERNATIVES, LE PEN SAID, OF IMMIGRATION AND BOOSTING THE NUMBER OF FRENCH CHILDREN.

Yet RN's lack of a credible social agenda creates an uncomfortable contradiction whenever it tries to paint itself as the party of opposition. A prime example came in the middle of February. In a speech on the floor of the National Assembly highlighting the explosion of workplace deaths in France since Macron came to power, LFI MP Aurélien Saintoul called the labor minister, Olivier Dussopt, a "murderer," which provoked a flurry of condemnation from the chamber. Saintoul was spotlighting Macron's responsibility after he cut the number of safety inspectors in French workplaces.

Saintoul soon apologized for his language — but not before Le Pen stood up and made clear her compatibility with Macron's government. Denouncing the LFI MP's "verbal escalation," Le Pen asked the members of the chamber to remember that, "in politics, we don't have enemies, we have adversaries." Cue applause from the chamber and cheers. "All of [the members of] my group give their support to Olivier Dussopt, who was very certainly wounded by this severe and serious insult."

But even beyond declarations of solidarity with the government against insults, RN's entire discourse carries water for Macron's agenda by accepting its premises. The party has repeatedly promoted the government's line about the necessity of "saving" France's pension system. During the presidential election, Le Pen proposed a xenophobic choice for how the system could be saved: France faced the alternatives, she said, of immigration and boosting the number of French children. Either "submerging" the country with more foreign immigrants or promoting a higher birth rate among native French people would provide the labor market with the necessary workers to "save" the pension system.

The reality, of course, is that France's pension system *isn't* threatened by an aging population. As Sciences Po economist Michaël Zemmour told *Jacobin's*

Harrison Stetler, the reform has nothing to do with raising more money to pay for future pensions.

Instead, it's about cutting spending entirely, with a goal of lowering taxes.

"There are deficits, and there are funding issues," he explained, "but there is no structural danger."

A 2022 report by the Conseil d'orientation des retraites, an independent government body tasked with analyzing the state of France's retirement system, concluded that there was no imminent funding crisis. Absent any changes, spending is projected to rise from 13.8 percent of GDP in 2021 to 13.9 percent in 2027.

"The real reason for this reform and its timing is to balance out tax cuts," Michaël Zemmour explained:

This is written in the budget and in commitments and communications with the European Union. Finance minister Bruno Le Maire has been saying it for two years: "My strategy is to lower spending in order to lower taxes." This, of course, would make the reform politically unacceptable, which is why the narrative has changed again in recent months, so that we now hear that "the system is in financial danger; if we don't do this, it will collapse." This is not true.

However, Le Pen has been banging the drum about the danger of the system collapsing for years. The claim dovetails with her racist narrative that African and Arab immigrants are looting France's social system. Part of her plan for keeping the financing of the pension system stable includes establishing a "priority for nationals" in all social welfare funding. This would mean social spending goes only to French people who have lived in the country continuously for at least five years.

There's not much daylight, it seems, between the austerity mindset of Emmanuel Macron and his supposed bitter foe Marine Le Pen. ■



THE REALITY IS THAT FRANCE'S PENSION SYSTEM ISN'T THREATENED BY AN AGING POPULATION.

ON MARXISM, MOUNT RUSHMORE, AND A MAOIST CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN AMERICA

We are watching a Maoist Cultural Revolution in America. It now has glitter, bright colors, and children sterilizing themselves.¹



Where I come from, 1+2 equals 12. That's the mentality we need to have to take back this country.² Here's what I know — no child of mine will ever attend

a university that promotes anti-American, anti-free speech, anti-capitalist garbage and antisemitic hate speech. Never. Ever. Over. My. Dead. Body. But this is now the real price of a college education.... The inmates are running the asylums and there's seemingly nowhere to turn.³  What the Lord has revealed to me is that Mount Rushmore has a direct ley line to Washington, DC.... That witchcraft, altar, and those things that are happening in the Black Hills, what we're dealing with is communism. It's the ideology and all the demonic entities and spirits behind that.⁴ BLM is full [of] witchcraft ... witches that are invoking the dead to do their work of chaos.... The lives of black people matter but BLM is run by three Marxist witches.⁵ Every ill that we are fighting right now in society has been brought forth by women.⁶ [Even] Cracker Barrel has fallen. A once family-friendly establishment has caved to the mob.⁷ We're getting back to a point where somebody's going to have to pull a trigger.⁸ My opinion of a white nationalist, if someone wants to call them white nationalist, to me is an American.⁹ 

1

Kristina Karamo, chairwoman of the Michigan Republican Party, Twitter/X, June 3, 2023.

2

Lavern Spicer, Republican congressional candidate for FL-22, Twitter/X, August 2, 2022.

3

Meghan McCain, former host of *The View*, column for *Daily Mail*, May 31, 2023.

4

Rep. Joe Donnell (R-01), member of the South Dakota House of Representatives, on *Now Is the Time* podcast, June 2023.

5

Dr Stella Immanuel, founder of Fire Power Ministries, Twitter/X, September 14, 2020.

6

Candace Owens, host of *Candace for the Daily Wire*, Turning Point USA's Young Women's Leadership Summit, June 10, 2023.

7

Texas Family Project, conservative nonprofit, Twitter/X, June 8, 2023.

8

Curt Schilling, former Major League Baseball pitcher, conversation with Jesse Watters on Fox News, June 17, 2023.

9

Sen. Tommy Tuberville (R-AL), conversation with Kaitlan Collins on CNN, July 11, 2023.

Plutocrat of the Quarter

What can't money buy?

WINNER

Paul Singer

President and co-CEO
of Elliott Management

\$5.5 billion

Hedge fund manager Paul Singer spent a week in 2008 wining and dining Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito at a \$1,000-a-day luxury fishing lodge in Alaska, where the two took awkward photographs together and built a relationship that would pay off down the line. Several cases involving Singer's companies came before the court, including one involving a decade-long battle between his hedge fund and the nation of Argentina. Alito never recused himself. Singer, a frequent GOP donor with deep pockets, has given upward of \$80 million to Republican political causes in the last decade alone, as well as millions to the Manhattan Institute, a prominent conservative think tank that frequently submits amicus briefs to the court. Alito's defense of his decision to accept a seat on Singer's private jet? "Had I taken commercial flights," he wrote in a borderline hysterical *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, "that would have imposed a substantial cost and inconvenience on the deputy U.S. Marshals who would have been required for security reasons to assist me."



THE IMMORTALITY HUSTLE

BY LUKE SAVAGE

Silicon Valley's quest to achieve eternal life is pure quackery. But it reveals much about the antidemocratic pathologies of the global superrich.

In 2017, writer and media theorist Douglas Rushkoff received an unusual invitation to speak at a luxury resort. Offered a generous commission and a vague but innocuous-sounding prompt — "the future of technology" — Rushkoff arrived at the appointed time expecting to find a Davos-esque gathering of a few hundred investment bankers

ready to pick his brain about predictable subjects like 3D printing or the blockchain. Instead, the author was ushered into a space so small and unassuming he initially mistook it for a green room.

As it turned out, no audience of expectant financiers awaited him, just a small roundtable and five exorbitantly wealthy men drawn from the most elite niches of

the hedge fund world, whose questions quickly took on a strangely sinister air.

In place of the techno-optimism that so often characterizes the public-facing rhetoric of the superrich, this coterie of plutocrats had a much grimmer and more dystopian set of concerns. Channeling Elon Musk's fantasies of interstellar colonization, Peter Thiel's quest to

Kelcy Warren

CEO of Energy Transfer Partners

\$5 billion

The GOP megadonor sued perennial political candidate Beto O'Rourke — who ran unsuccessfully for governor of Texas last year — for defamation after O'Rourke opened his latest campaign with a string of invectives against Warren's gas company, Energy Transfer Partners, which profited off the lethal winter storm that hit Texas in February 2021. O'Rourke implied that a massive donation Warren made to his opponent, incumbent governor Greg Abbott, was a bribe to ensure he would go easy on the company, infamous for the Dakota Access Pipeline, in the storm's aftermath by allowing it to opt out of weatherization requirements. It turns out Warren had also funneled money, directly and indirectly, into the coffers of six of the nine justices of the Texas Supreme Court, where the case could have landed if an appeals court hadn't dismissed the suit this summer, ruling that O'Rourke's statements were protected by the First Amendment.

Miriam Adelson

Largest shareholder of Las Vegas Sands Corporation

\$35 billion

The widow of Sheldon Adelson, longtime CEO of the Las Vegas Sands Corporation, is maintaining her late husband's plutocratic practice of holding court for Republican presidential candidates eager for a cut of the family's gambling fortune. The Adelsons — the largest GOP donors of the last decade, with contributions exceeding half a billion dollars, not to mention an important backing of autocratic Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu — previously dedicated enormous sums to former president Donald Trump, a pattern that Miriam is expected to continue. But Governor Ron DeSantis, among other GOP hopefuls, is grabbing for her wallet in the meantime: the two were spotted dining at the Museum of Tolerance Jerusalem in Israel in the spring. The Adelsons have supported DeSantis in the past to the tune of \$500,000 for his 2018 gubernatorial campaign — calling into question which of those two evils, DeSantis or Trump, will reap the benefits of Adelson's ill-gotten gains.

the action, planning to spend \$1 billion a year through a newly created nonprofit, the Hevolution Foundation, on research to reverse aging. Silicon Valley's Altos Labs, billed as a "rejuvenation startup," counts the likes of Jeff Bezos — whose farewell letter to Amazon shareholders included the words "Staving off death is a thing that you have to work at" — among its most prominent investors.

Amusingly, or perhaps alarmingly, these cases probably represent the saner and more plausible end of the plutocratic imagination when it comes to the pursuit of immortality. Not content with the idea of simply living longer, a second faction is investing its hopes in the digital realm and seeking to transcend biology altogether. Drawing inspiration from futurist Ray Kurzweil, for example, Russian billionaire Dmitry Itskov's 2045 Initiative aims to "create technologies enabling the transfer of an individual's personality to a more advanced nonbiological carrier, and extending life, including to the point of immortality" — an objective its founder is "100 percent certain" can be achieved within a few decades. Silicon Valley's Sam Altman, meanwhile, has already paid a hefty sum to join the waiting list of a start-up company that promises to digitally preserve human consciousness after death. "I assume my brain will be uploaded to the cloud," Altman told the *MIT Technology Review* in 2018.

reverse the aging process, and the reveries of transhumanists who one day hope to upload themselves to computers, all were less interested in wielding technology to solve collective problems than in using it to escape them. They were, in Rushkoff's words, "preparing for a digital future that had a whole lot less to do with making the world a better place than ... transcending the human condition altogether and insulating themselves from [the] very real and present danger of climate change, rising sea levels, mass migrations, global pandemics, nativist panic, and resource depletion."

"Death is sort of an affront to American life," as novelist Zadie Smith put it. "It's so anti-aspirational." In an era defined by existential crises, political paralysis, and raging inequality, the idea of escaping death itself is now a booming business. According to one estimate, the antiaging industry alone generates more than \$80 billion a year despite having yielded no tangible results when it comes to actually extending the human life span. Last year, a single "Longevity Investors Conference" held in the Swiss Alps attracted more than one hundred millionaires and billionaires, each of whom paid \$4,500 for admission while pledging to contribute at least \$1 million to the cause. The Saudi royal family is also getting in on

Whether biologically or cybernetically oriented, the whole enterprise raises a number of obvious political and moral questions, to say nothing of the many glaring scientific and philosophical ones. On its face, there is nothing inherently wrong with the idea of using medical science to help people live longer. The current immortality craze, however, is less a democratic quest for collective human betterment than an expression of various pathologies that now predominate among the global superwealthy.

Every ruling class in history has seen itself as exceptional. But as Rushkoff observes in his 2022 book *Survival of the Richest*, ours is the first that has "assumed that the primary impact" of its

Antiaging Regimens

Elites have long tried to dodge death. Nothing has worked so far, and plenty have died trying.

own activities will be to “render the world itself unlivable for everyone else” and consequently look for ways to escape from it. On a more basic level, many of the planet’s wealthiest people — accustomed to having their every whim satisfied in the material world — are evidently frustrated by the reality that even boundless riches have their limits. “If you buy a yacht, you can always get a

THE SUPERRICH’S QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY IS THE LOGICAL END POINT OF ITS LUST FOR POWER AND DESIRE TO OPERATE WITHOUT CONSTRAINT.

bigger yacht; if you buy a plane, you can always get a bigger plane,” billionaire Christian Angermayer told last year’s Longevity Investors Conference in Gstaad, Switzerland. “But,” he continued, making a pitch for big investments in longevity science, “the [extent to which] your life is changing with more money is actually very minimal.”

Viewed this way, the superrich’s quest for immortality is merely the logical end point of its visceral lust for power and desire to operate without regulation or constraint. Markets — not representative democracy — increasingly rule the world, and twenty-first-century capitalism has allowed their greatest beneficiaries to accrue more freedom and influence than anyone in human history. Rich or poor, however, existence is finite, and mortality, by definition, democratic. In this sense, death is one of the few frontiers of democracy the planet’s plutocrats have yet to overcome.

Finding the Fountain of Youth

One of the most straightforward routes to eternal life involves locating the mythical Fountain of Youth, a spring that allegedly has the power to restore the elderly to adolescence. The font has piqued the interest of European explorers since at least the classical period in antiquity, with especially concerted efforts to find it (supposedly) made by the Spanish conquistadores of the 16th century. Instead they found Florida, which is today home to one of the largest populations of elderly people in the United States.

Drinking heavy metals

From the Qin through the Ming dynasty, countless Chinese nobles and other elites — including at least six Tang dynasty emperors — died from consumption of elixirs of eternal life that contained substances like mercury, lead, gold, silver, cinabar, copper carbonate, vitriol, sulfur, sulfuric acid, arsenic, arsenic sulfide, and more. Contemporary texts describe some of the key symptoms of metallic poisoning (like the sensation of insects crawling over the body) as firm proof that the elixirs were working.



“This is as self-serving as the Medici building a Renaissance chapel in Italy, but with a little extra Silicon Valley narcissism thrown in,” remarked one skeptical scientist in 2017 of the ultra-

wealthy’s quest for eternal life. “It’s based on the frustration of many successful rich people that life is too short: ‘We have all this money, but we only get to live a normal life span.’” ■

Consuming the blood of the young

The medieval Italian humanist Marsilio Ficino advised consuming the blood of a willing juvenile in order to turn back the biological clock. "Why shouldn't our old people, namely those who have no recourse ... suck the blood of a youth?" he asks, presumably rhetorically, in his 1489 text *De Vita*. For taste, he recommends boiling the concoction to cut the bitterness and then mixing the blood with sugar and water. According to legend, a dying Pope Innocent VIII took it one step further in 1492 and injected fresh young blood directly into his veins; he died regardless.

Injecting bodily secretions

Late in his life, the pioneering endocrinologist Charles-Édouard Brown-Séquard turned his attention from glands to the glamour of eternal life. In an 1889 presentation before the Société de Biologie, he declared that daily injections of an "elixir" made from the testicular blood, seminal fluid, and crushed testicles of guinea pigs and dogs had made him feel 30 years younger. The declaration was met with wide ridicule, but that didn't stop thousands of Victorian physicians from giving it a try.

Transplanting fresh testicles

A protégé of Brown-Séquard, the Russian surgeon Serge Voronoff, advanced his former partner's theories by concluding that grafts of animal tissue and testicles would go much further than mere injections. He expounded upon his ideas in a 1920 book, *Life: A Study of the Means of Restoring Vital Energy and Prolonging Life*, in which he explained how transplanting a young animal's penis onto an elderly man would rejuvenate the latter.

Rich and famous people
who plan to rise again:

FROZEN IN TIME

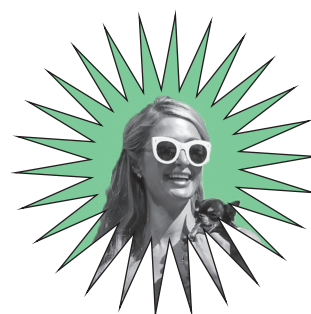
The rich have it so good that one lifetime
is not enough: some of them are turning
to cryonics in the hopes of someday
coming back for more.



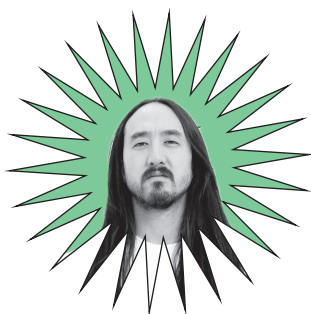
Seth MacFarlane,
creator of *Family Guy*

The baseball legend Ted Williams and (if the rumors are true) the film producer Walt Disney are not the only American celebrities spending their afterlives on ice; hundreds of people, in fact, have gambled that cryonics — the practice of storing human remains in a tank of liquid nitrogen — will preserve their physical remains until technology has progressed enough to reanimate their corpses.

The first attempts at cryonics date back to the 1960s, based on the theory proposed by physics professor Robert Ettinger, "the father of cryonics," in *The Prospect of Immortality*. However, of the 17 documented attempts made before 1973, all but one resulted in catastrophic failures, including the decomposition of a human body into a "liquid plug." Since then, technology has progressed enough that bodies-on-the-rocks can generally avoid liquefaction, but — despite the best efforts of cryonics companies like Alcor Life Extension Foundation and Ettinger's own Cryonics Institute — they are no closer to reincarnation. What those companies are good at is fleecing their living clients, sometimes charging up to \$200,000 to preserve their earthly remains. The start-up Nectome, in the business of freezing brains, charges the ultimate price: life itself. In exchange for the mere possibility that it might someday be able to turn a human brain into software, one must cough up a cool \$10,000 deposit to be euthanized by the company by means of live chemical embalming.



Paris Hilton, socialite (along with
chihuahua Tinkerbelle and terrier
Cinderella)



Steve Aoki, DJ



Peter Thiel, cofounder of PayPal

Fast Facts:

500

Estimated number of Americans
cryogenically frozen

-320.8°F

Temperature at which the bodies
are kept

\$10-200K

Cost of cryogenic preservation

2028-2128

Estimated year of reawakening



Britney Spears, singer



Dick Clair, actor

MISERY INDEX

Crunching the numbers on the class war.

32,194

Americans aged
100+ in 1980



104,819

Americans aged
100+ in 2020

4%

Americans who give the
US health care system an A

17%

Americans who
give it a B

34%

Americans who
give it a C

30%

Americans who
give it a D

14%

Americans who
give it an F

80%

Americans who wish
to die at home

60%

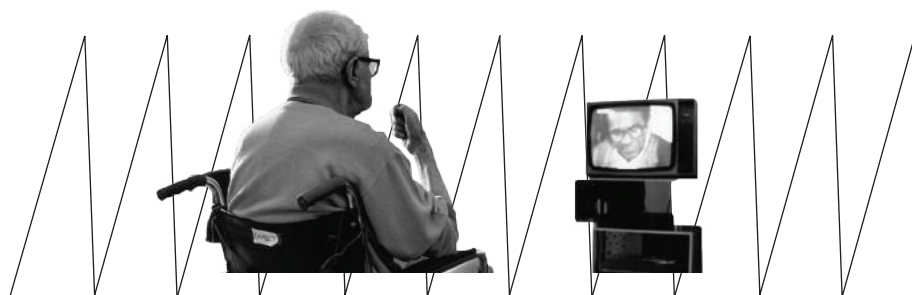
Americans who die
in the hospital

20%

Americans who die
in nursing homes

40,000

Unclaimed bodies stored in
morgues across America



38M

Number of households
headed by adults
aged 65+ in 2020

77%

Americans aged 50+ who
wish to remain in their
homes long-term

16%

Elderly people worldwide
who live alone

27%

Elderly Americans
who live alone

42M

Number of households
headed by adults
aged 65+ in 2040

7.4M

Number of renter
households headed by
adults aged 65+ in 2020

12.9M

Number of renter
households headed by
adults aged 65+ in 2040

54%

Adults 50+ who report
being a caregiver to an adult
65+ in the past two years

25%

Adults 50+ who report that
work being more difficult
than they expected

28

Number of the top 38
antiaging start-ups that are
based in the US

 $\frac{1}{10}$

Americans aged 65+ living
below the poverty line

 $\frac{1}{4}$

Americans aged 65+ who
scrimp on food and other
necessities to afford health
care costs

11%

Americans aged 65+
who reported using
cannabis in 2009

32%

Americans aged 65+
who reported using
cannabis in 2019

 $\frac{6}{10}$

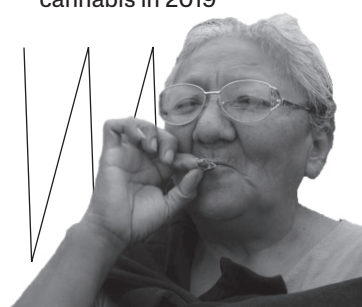
American adults who
do not have a will or
living trust

47%

American adults who
don't have those because
they haven't gotten
around to it

29%

American adults who don't
have those because they
don't have enough assets to
leave to anyone



57%

15- to 24-year-olds globally
who think the world is
becoming a better place
with each generation

39%

40-plus-year-olds who
think the same thing

67%

Americans under 65 who
worry that Medicare won't
be available by the time they
become eligible

75%

Americans under 65 who
worry that Social Security
won't be available by the
time they become eligible

42.6M

Americans aged 45+
suffering from chronic
loneliness

 $\frac{1}{4}$

Americans aged 65+
considered socially
isolated

32%

Increased likelihood of
early death among socially
isolated adults, compared to
less isolated peers

6%

Americans aged 50+ who
say they have no friends

34%

Adults 50+ who report
experiencing emotional or
physical fatigue as a result

31%

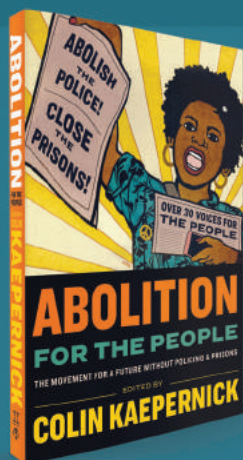
Adults 50+ who report
experiencing trouble balancing
work or other activities

22%

Adults 50+ who report
experiencing a lack of time
for self-care

21%

Adults 50+ who report
experiencing trouble balancing
time with family or friends

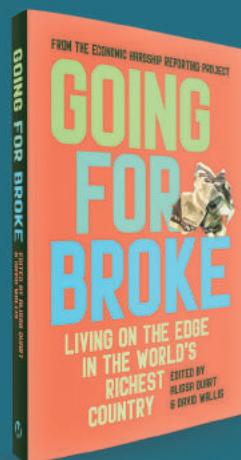


ABOLITION FOR THE PEOPLE

The Movement for a Future
without Policing & Prisons
Edited by Colin Kaepernick

"An unprecedented collection."

—Barbara Ransby



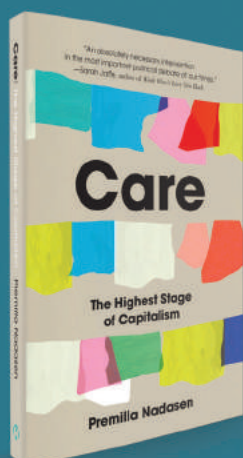
GOING FOR BROKE

Living on the Edge in the
World's Richest Country

Edited by Alissa Quart
& David Wallis

"This is a book with a pulse."

—Jeff Sharlet

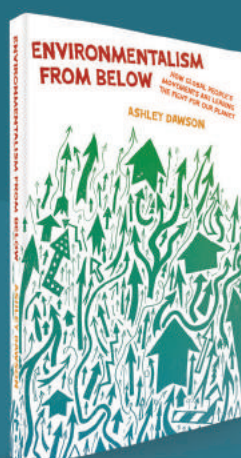


CARE

The Highest Stage
of Capitalism
Premilla Nadasen

"An absolutely necessary intervention."

—Sarah Jaffe

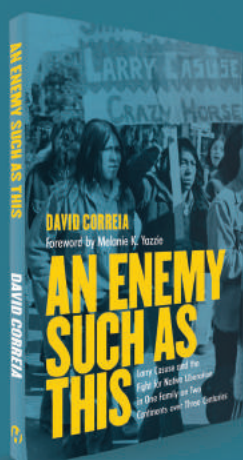


ENVIRONMENTALISM FROM BELOW

How Global People's
Movements Are Leading
the Fight for Our Planet
Ashley Dawson

"Readable, practical, and inspiring."

—Kai Bosworth



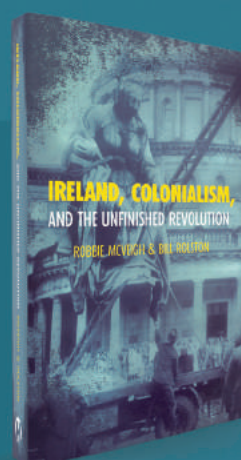
AN ENEMY SUCH AS THIS

Larry Casuse and the Fight
for Native Liberation in One
Family on Two Continents
over Three Centuries

David Correia
Foreword by Melanie K. Yazzi

"Breathtaking and original."

—Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz



IRELAND, COLONIALISM, AND THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION

Robbie McVeigh & Bill Rolston

"Excellent and critically important."

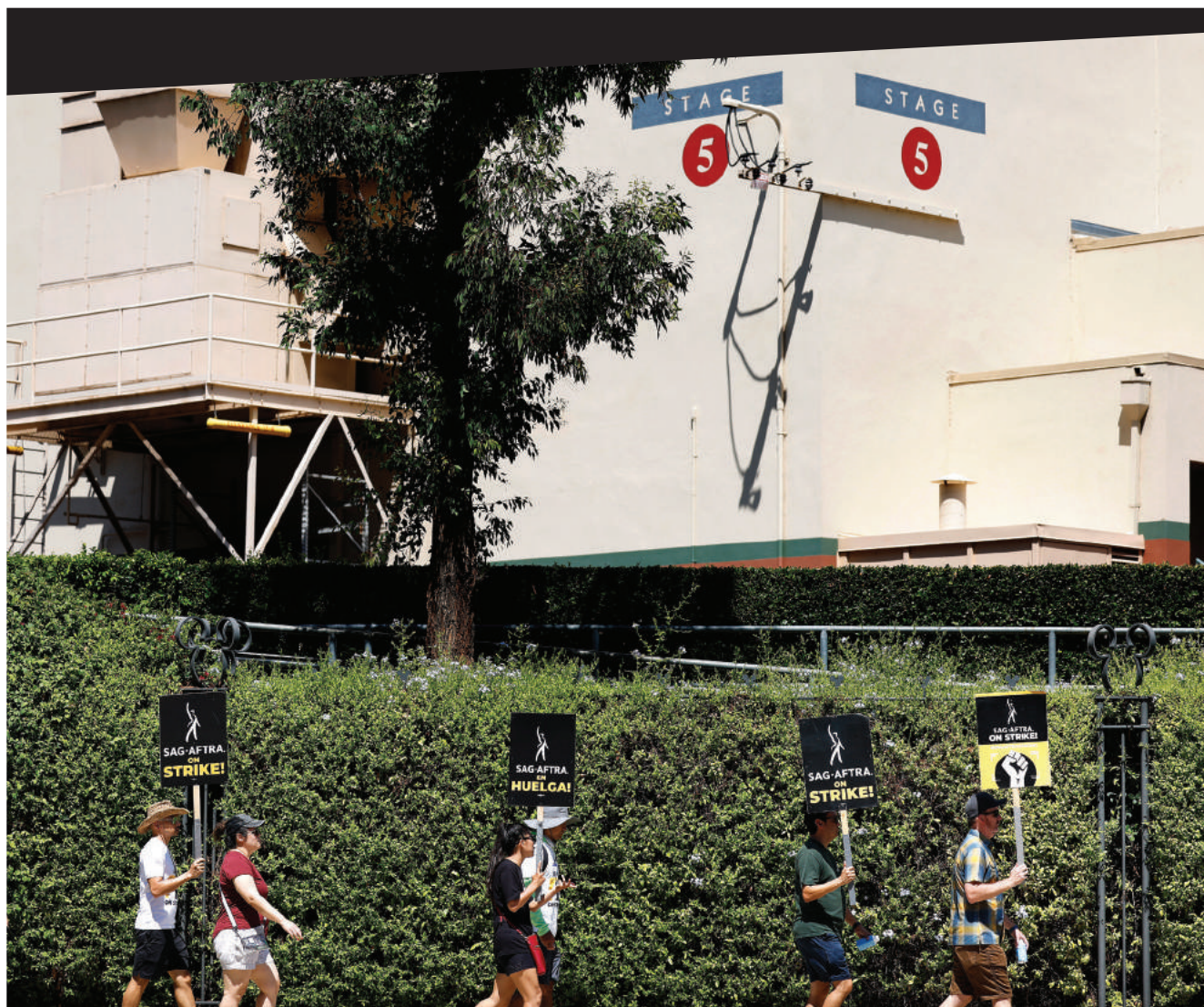
—Irish News



NEW TITLES FROM HAYMARKET BOOKS

HAYMARKETBOOKS.ORG

LEFTOVERS



Will average entertainment workers be able to eke out a living in an industry awash in cash, or will studio executives use new tech like AI to gobble it all up? pg. 115

INSIDE

"Social security insolvency" is code for cutting our benefits pg. 108

The glamour of Soviet gerontocracy pg. 111

THE VULGAR EMPIRICIST

“Social Security Insolvency” Is Code for Cutting Our Benefits

by Matt Bruenig

Fully funding Social Security isn't hard. We should do it.

Before long, the last of the United States' 76 million baby boomers will turn 67, and the proportion of Americans who claim Social Security benefits will reach historic highs. It's no surprise that millions of millennials and Gen Zers think that the program will probably run out of money before they retire.

Despite a lack of public support, conservative think tanks are using this environment to continue to push for cuts to the Social Security program. These reforms are generally described as increases to the retirement age, but they don't actually change the age at which people can retire; they just cut benefit levels at all eligible Social Security retirement ages.

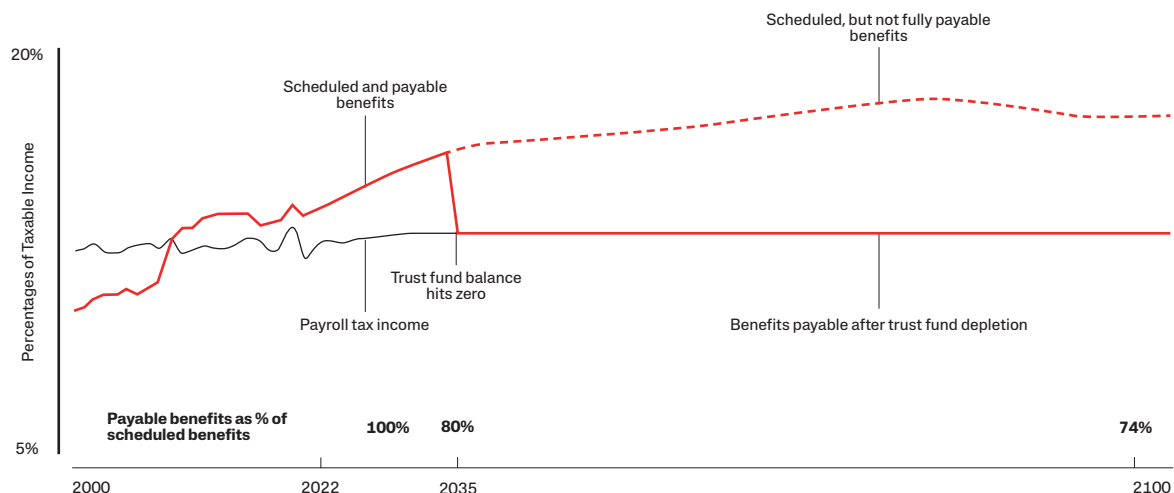
Underlying most efforts to slash benefits is the claim that the program is facing “insolvency.” This is a scary word that is neither technically accurate nor effective at getting people to understand the real challenges Social Security faces.

The Social Security Administration pays recipients using payroll taxes and the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance Trust Fund, whose value increased to \$2.9 trillion before the program's expenditures began to exceed its tax income in 2021. Social Security “insolvency” refers only to the point when the aggregate benefits people could receive exceed the program's revenues and trust fund assets.

Since the program's benefit levels are constrained by a solvency requirement, this will trigger an across-the-board benefit cut to balance the two sums. According to the latest Social Security projections, absent program changes, this cut will take effect in 2035 and will amount to a 20 percent reduction, growing to a 26 percent reduction in 2096.

This differs from what people generally think of when they hear the word “insolvency,” which is that the program will collapse entirely, and benefits will stop going out. That will never happen.

Social Security Benefits Before and After So-Called Insolvency



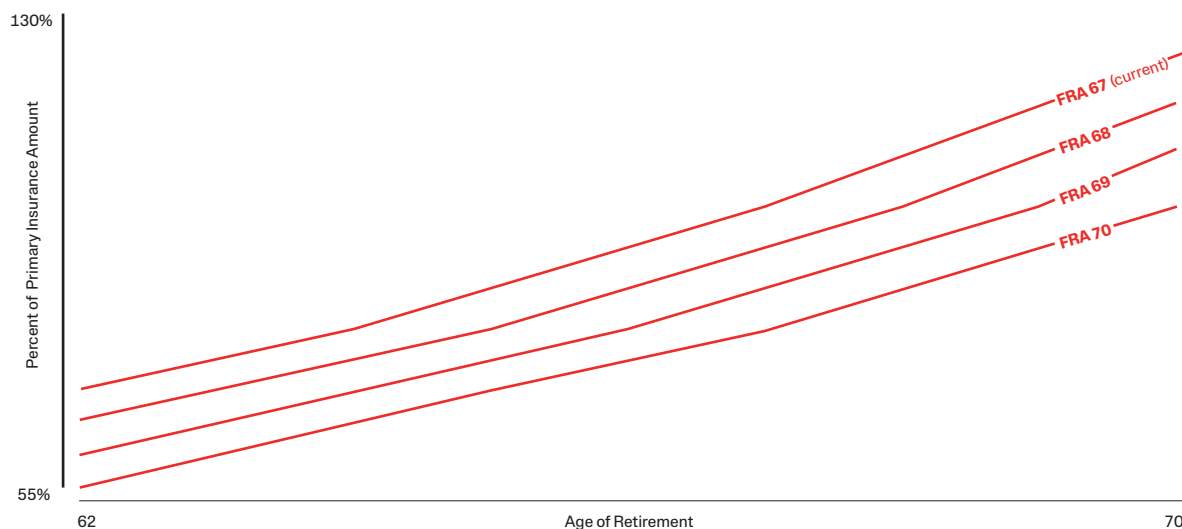
In fact, the thing advocates call “insolvency” — an across-the-board benefit cut — is really no different from raising the retirement age, since Social Security does not have just one retirement age but 96, one for each month between ages 62 and 70. What people call the “full retirement age” (FRA) is just a placeholder in a formula that determines the benefit level at all 96 retirement ages.

People who retire at the FRA receive 100 percent of the primary insurance amount (PIA), which is a dollar figure derived from a formula applied to each individual’s earnings record. Those who retire before

or after the FRA receive less or more than 100 percent of the PIA, based on how far away from the FRA they are when they retire.

In the scenario graphed above, “insolvency” results in a 20 percent reduction in benefits in 2035. By contrast, raising the FRA to 70 results in a 23 percent benefit reduction, as a larger proportion of retirees find themselves receiving less than the PIA. So “raising the retirement age” doesn’t avoid “insolvency”: these are just two opaque phrases used to describe the *exact same policy*.

Percent of Social Security Primary Insurance Amount Received by Age of Retirement for Different Full Retirement Ages (FRAs)



Source: People's Policy Project

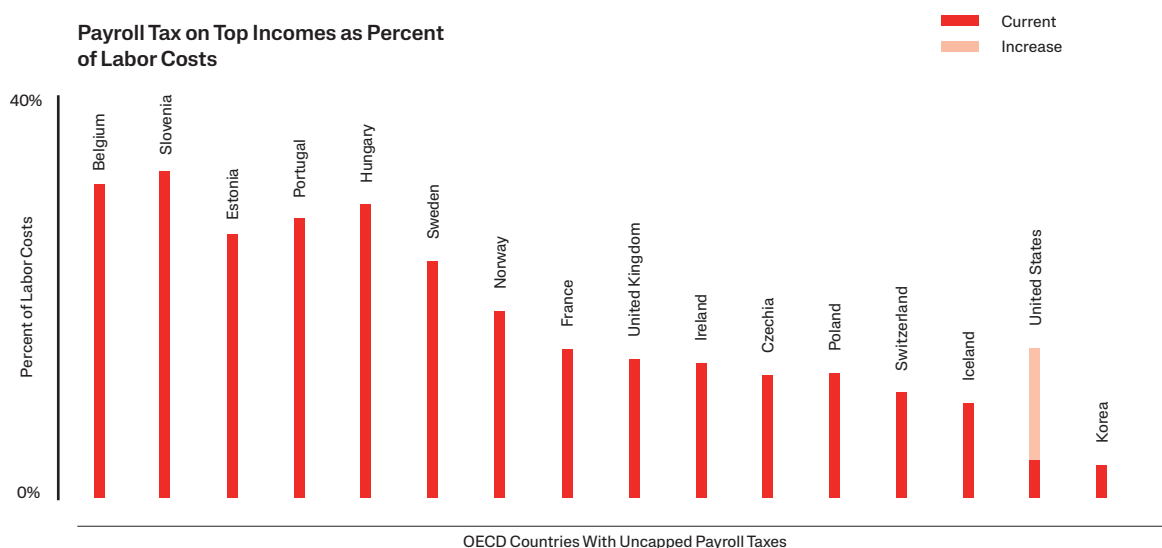
The main reason advocates are able to frighten people with the specter of insolvency is that the current law requires the Social Security program to respond to revenue shortfalls by cutting benefits. But policymakers could easily change this trigger, and they should.

For example, the relevant law could be amended to state that, whenever revenue falls short of scheduled benefits, the Social Security payroll tax will automatically be increased to make the two sums balance. According to the Social Security Administration trustees, we would need to increase the rate by 3.24 percentage points today or by 4.07 percentage points in 2035. These amounts would be lower if we also eliminated the payroll tax cap to ensure that Social Security taxes apply to all earnings, not just

those below \$160,200 — they could even be zero for most Americans if we made it so that revenue shortfalls only trigger Social Security payroll tax increases on high earners.

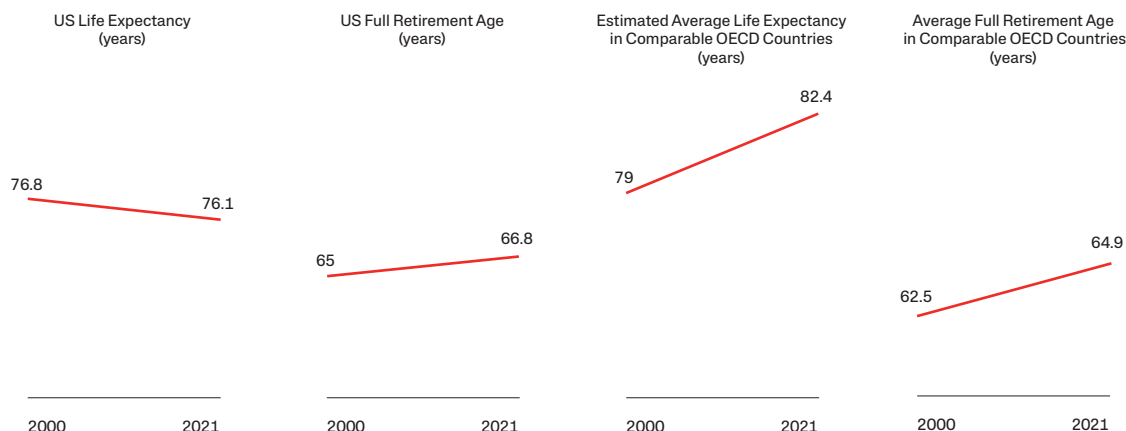
Changing the trigger in this way would not require any new taxes or really alter anything about how the program operates in the near term. All it would do is change the default outcome of so-called insolvency. No longer would it mean automatic benefit cuts — it would instead mean automatic tax increases on the rich. This change would transform negotiations over the Social Security program while completely undercutting the ability of austerity-minded organizations and commentators to mislead and terrify people about Social Security's future as part of their agenda to cut the program. ■

Payroll Tax on Top Incomes as Percent of Labor Costs



Source: People's Policy Project

Changes in Life Expectancy and Retirement Age



Source: Peterson-KFF Health System Tracker, OECD

DUSTBIN

The Glamour of Gerontocracy

What the famously elderly leaders of the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union meant for millions.

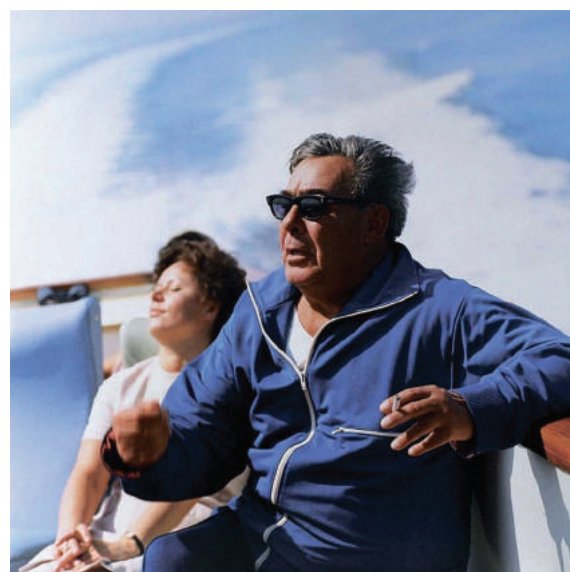
by Kirill Kobrin

The Western press called them the “Kremlin elders.” They were all born between 1902 and 1914. And they all died between 1980 and 1985. It was no coincidence that after they passed, everything collapsed — their country, their regime, their ideology.

Yet they were not very old. When, in 1972, Communist general secretary Leonid Brezhnev received Richard Nixon in Moscow, the host was just seven years older than the guest. Brezhnev’s successor, Yuri Andropov, was almost a year younger than West German chancellor Willy Brandt. Andropov’s successor, Konstantin Chernenko, and Ronald Reagan were both born in 1911.

Nevertheless, they certainly *looked* very old. From the end of the 1970s, Soviet leaders on TV resembled a bunch of zombies, all led by a bloated clown decorated with countless medals and endowed with

Leonid Brezhnev appears tanned, robust, and spry in a series of images taken by his personal photographer, Vladimir Musaelyan, between 1969 and 1982.



legendary bushy brows that would make Cara Delevingne envious.

These people had all survived Joseph Stalin’s purges by the time they’d reached thirty. Then they made a great career leap into the frantic Nikita Khrushchev epoch, only to overthrow Khrushchev himself, likely because they were tired of the political

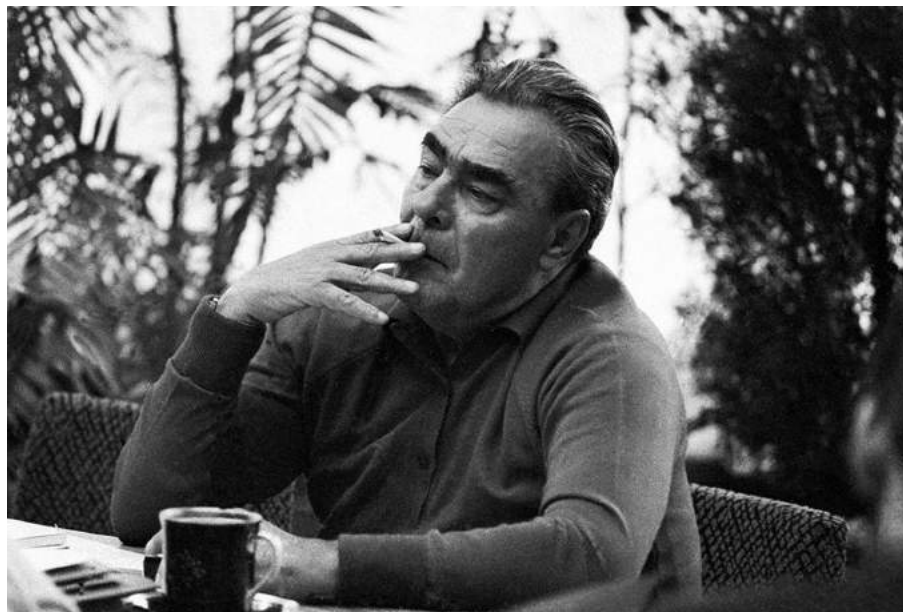
and existential roller coaster. They needed stability and normality — on their terms, of course. A relatively modest lifestyle, even mild asceticism, was their destiny. The “elders” enjoyed their power and their stability, but they appeared not to enjoy life. Except for their boss — Leonid Brezhnev himself.

In the dozens of recently rediscovered pictures taken by his court photographer, Vladimir Musaelyan, we finally have conclusive evidence of Brezhnev’s lust for life. We can see a man in his late sixties obviously relaxing and enjoying private life. It’s not a luxurious existence, of course — distant from both the opulent lifestyle of Hollywood stars and the gaudiness of Vladimir Putin’s hideouts. Descendant of a working-class family from eastern Ukraine, Brezhnev became the

head of a state where the proletariat was declared the ruling class. In other words, the lifestyle we see through Musaelyan’s pictures mirrors the gains most Soviet people accrued during Brezhnev’s long rule. Unlike Stalin and Khrushchev, Brezhnev managed to privatize and normalize his personal life — and that was the thing which the population of the USSR had been allowed to do.

In most of the photos, Brezhnev looks like an older Elvis Presley if he’d only quit his pills and burgers and instead dedicated his time to simple pleasures — hunting, yacht trips, a couple of drinks before bed. In his sunglasses and Gregory Peck haircut, he sometimes resembles a Hollywood actor draped in an Austrian-style hunting overcoat and





Brezhnev sometimes resembles a Hollywood actor draped in an overcoat and Tyrolean hat.

Tyrolean hat. Everything fits him well. That is why Brezhnev looks so natural in the official photos with American presidents: at long last they seem to be characters from the same world, or from the same movie.

You couldn't imagine Brezhnev gobbing into a spittoon, as Mao did during his talks with Nixon and Henry Kissinger. It wasn't until 1976, over a decade into his reign, that Brezhnev's health began to collapse. That was the Brezhnev most Soviet people remember: a gibbering politburo golem on pentobarbital, now resembling a different kind of Elvis altogether — the King just before his death.

But what is really interesting in this story is its political dimension: how Brezhnev's lifestyle represented a wider privatization of everyday life in the Soviet '60s and '70s. Under his leadership, a gigantic housing program moved millions from communal flats to private apartments, and citizens, at last, could be alone. With this newfound privacy, they were able to build a different kind of life outside the public and ideological spheres, one that was pretty enjoyable — certainly in comparison with Stalinism, the war, and the early Khrushchev period. Living standards improved until the end of 1970s, especially for the urban population. TV, cinemas, bookshops, museums, concert halls, and theaters provided them with a new sort of entertainment, less ideologically charged, with a middlebrow, middle-class style —

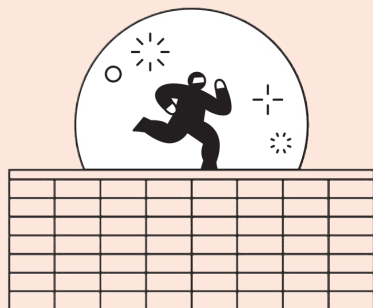
neither pompous Stalinist classicism nor the renewed modernism of Khrushchev's "thaw."

This transformation rested on two pillars: first, a relative financial stability, the outcome of the reorientation of the Soviet economy to gas and oil exports; and second, the ideological turn to "normality." Khrushchev is remembered for claiming, in 1961, that by 1980, "the next generation of Soviet people will live in the communist era." By the end of the '60s, it became obvious that this would never happen. Brezhnev's ideological team responded to this nuisance with the new concept of "developed socialism," an almost eternal stage in the progression to communism. After they moved communism beyond the horizon, the only thing left to Soviet people and their leader was to relax and have a good time.

Then, in 1977, the same court ideologues took the next step and declared their era "the *perfecting* of developed socialism," a sort of eternal present continuous. This scholastic masterpiece marked the highest point in the Soviet version of socialism. From there, the only way to go was downhill: for Brezhnev, to a semi-vegetative state and eventually to the grave by the Kremlin wall; for the USSR, to its collapse and thirty years of ridiculous and dangerous post-Soviet capitalism, culminating in Putin — now the precise age Brezhnev was in 1977 — committing the Russian state's *seppuku* at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives. ■

Old Thieves Never Die

Some of the biggest heists we could find on Wikipedia were committed by the elderly.



THE CAT BURGLAR

Over the course of eight years, an unusually agile Japanese senior committed more than 250 burglaries, totaling more than \$250,000 in ill-gotten gains, while dressed all in black, inspiring media attention as the “Ninja of Heisei.” Mitsuaki Tanigawa lived as a regular pensioner during the day but at night would retreat to an abandoned warehouse on the other side of the city to don black and commit feats originally attributed to a much younger man — like running along high walls and disappearing into narrow alleys — all while evading the police. “If I were younger, I wouldn’t have been caught,” he said upon his eventual arrest in 2017. “I’ll quit now as I’m 74 and old enough.”



THE FOLK HERO

The serial bank robber and escape artist Forrest Tucker (best known for a yearlong spree of 60-plus robberies across Oklahoma, Texas, and California after escaping from San Quentin State Prison in 1970, one of his 18 successful jailbreaks) committed his final string of burglaries at age 79 near Pompano Beach, Florida, sticking up the Republic Security Bank at three different locations in 1998 and pocketing \$14,699. His final caper ended in a police chase at a geriatric 45 mph, capping off a criminal career worth millions in stolen money and goods. “He was addicted to the adrenaline of the game and couldn’t stop,” said one career FBI man of Tucker in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*.

THE MARCH ON VERSAILLES

After gleaning her whereabouts from social media, a crew of French cons plotted to rob the celebrity influencer Kim Kardashian during Paris Fashion Week in 2016. Disguised as police officers, five men entered Kardashian’s apartment at the Hôtel de Pourtalès, cuffed her at gunpoint, locked her in a bathroom, and made off with more than \$10 million worth of jewelry. “Since she was throwing money away, I was there to collect it, and that was that,” said Yunice Abbas, 63, author of *J’ai séquestré Kim Kardashian*, in an interview with *Vice*. “[Do I feel] guilty? No, I don’t care. I don’t care.”

THE REUNION TOUR

A gang of experienced elderly thieves orchestrated the largest burglary in English legal history in 2015, taking advantage of a bank holiday to penetrate as many as 70 vaults in an underground safe deposit facility in London. Dressed as workmen, they entered through an elevator shaft, then repeatedly drilled through 20 inches of reinforced concrete to access the vaults, making off with \$22.3 million in cash, gold, gems, and jewelry — most of which has yet to be recovered. It was one for the books: “The biggest robbery in the fucking world, Dan, we was on,” the police recorded Terrence Perkins, 67, saying to Daniel Jones, 60, the week after the heist.

THE MADE MEN

A group of sexagenarian mobsters associated with the Genovese, Lucchese, and Kansas City crime families descended on the shops of two Manhattan jewelers in a robbery reminiscent of the Italian American Mafia’s 20th-century heyday in New York. Dressed as construction workers and brandishing guns, Frank “Frankie the Fish” DiPietro, 65, and Michael “Skip” Sellick, 67, ambushed the jewelers and seized bejeweled necklaces, earrings, and rings worth \$2 million in early 2023. Sellick’s lawyer is calling the whole situation a “terrible case of mistaken identity.” After all, how could old men do something like this?

POPULAR FRONT

Hollywood Is on Strike Against High-Tech Exploitation

by Alex N. Press



Actor Mark Gray raises a fist and a sign outside of Walt Disney Studios in Burbank, California, August 22, 2023.

Will average entertainment workers be able to eke out a living in an industry awash in cash, or will studio executives use new tech like AI to gobble it all up?

Before she appeared on HBO's *White House Plumbers* and Fox's *New Girl*, Stevie Nelson hosted a television show on Nickelodeon. On *Crashletes*, she and her cohosts, along with an audience of kids, reacted to viral videos of people failing at sports. The production ran for three seasons, wrapping at the end of 2020 with a total of sixty episodes.

Nelson worries that, soon, a studio could use that body of work to train artificial intelligence (AI) to create a likeness of her to be used in perpetuity: a digital Stevie Nelson, doing things she has never done, saying things she has never said, yet indistinguishable from the real Stevie Nelson, based on her past on-screen work.

"There's enough footage of me that they could technically have me host other shows for the rest of my life without ever having done it, and I'm sure I would not be fairly compensated for it," said Nelson. "The idea of not a real person hosting shows is scary. The magic of acting, and of hosting, is its impromptu nature. I can't imagine how soulless it all would be to replace it with AI."

Nelson and I were speaking in July, a few feet from the picket line outside Netflix's corporate office in Los Angeles. She's a member of the Screen Actors Guild–American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), one of 160,000 such members who were then on their second day of a nationwide strike. In walking out, the performers joined roughly 11,500 members of the Writers Guild of America (WGA), who have been on strike since May 2. The last such double strike was in 1960, when Ronald Reagan was SAG's president.

Unlike less accessible studios in the Los Angeles area, Netflix is in the heart of Hollywood. That day, morale was high: hundreds of union members picketed while music that sampled news coverage of the strike blasted from stereos, and union staff supplied workers with beverages, snacks, and sunscreen as the temperatures soared above 90 degrees.

Nelson's fears that an avatar of herself will host television shows indefinitely in a digital purgatory might sound far-fetched, an idea more fit for a *Black Mirror* script than the real world, but such a possibility

Members of SAG-AFTRA picket outside Warner Bros. Studios in Burbank, California, August 31, 2023.



“The magic of acting, and of hosting, is its impromptu nature. I can’t imagine how soulless it all would be to replace it with AI.”

is central to what is now the largest strike in the United States. In negotiations with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) for a new three-year TV/theatrical contract, SAG-AFTRA is seeking to regulate the use of AI to protect performers like her.

Writers want to govern the usage of AI in their own negotiations with the studios, but the technology poses an even more immediate threat to performers. SAG-AFTRA proposed provisions that would require the studios to get informed consent from a performer before using her likeness and fairly compensate her for that use. They also offered proposals concerning the use of generative AI for training purposes.

The AMPTP didn’t agree. While the organization called its AI counterproposal “unprecedented,” SAG-AFTRA’s national executive director and chief negotiator, Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, characterized the studios’ offer as unacceptable.

“In this ‘groundbreaking’ AI proposal that they gave us ... they proposed that our background performers should be able to be scanned, get one day’s pay, and their companies should own that scan — their image, their likeness — and should be able to use it for the rest of eternity on any project they want, with no consent and no compensation,” said Crabtree-Ireland at a press conference on July 15, announcing that the union’s board of directors had voted unanimously to call a strike. “If you think that’s a groundbreaking proposal, I suggest you think again.”

“The companies have responded to a number of the proposals that we put on the table, but the problem is, the devil is in the details,” explained Crabtree-Ireland on *The Town*, a podcast about the entertainment industry. “We had reached some

agreement on the issue of there being a requirement for consent, but from our point of view, it has to be informed consent. Consent is not a boilerplate provision at the time you’re first hired on a project that says, ‘The company can create a digital replica of you and use it for whatever purpose they want, forever.’”

Under such an arrangement, a performer would have little leverage to hold out against an AI clause — the studio could simply replace them with another, more desperate performer willing to agree to it. The issue will be relevant for members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) in their contract negotiations next year, too: if producers cut down on the number of real performers in a project, they’ll want to cut down on costume designers, hair and makeup artists, and other below-the-line workers as well. Actors fear that, without sufficient protections, they will effectively lose control of their faces, their voices, and their bodies.

“I keep thinking of that concept from *Succession*, ‘not a real person,’” actor Kate Comer told me as we sat in a spot of shade outside the Netflix office. She was referring to a phrase the show’s ultrawealthy characters use to refer to workers at their company; Nelson had used the same phrase when describing her concerns about AI. “The thought of not having control over yourself and allowing other people to do whatever they want with you and your voice is terrifying. We just want regulations. We just want to have power over our own bodies.”

AI is just one of the points of disagreement between the actors and the studios. On wages, SAG-AFTRA has proposed an 11 percent raise in the first year of the contract to catch up after years of inflation; the studios countered with 5 percent per year, which would amount to a pay cut. There’s also the need to fill a significant hole in the health and pension fund. The union proposed raising the contribution caps by an amount equal to inflation — the caps haven’t been increased since the last actors’ strike in 1980 — and the AMPTP countered with a much smaller, \$5,000 increase.

And there is the issue of self-taping for auditions, which became the norm during the COVID-19 pandemic. The shift has saved producers untold hundreds of millions of dollars annually, and SAG-AFTRA is proposing regulations for the practice. The studios responded by insisting that such protections would not be subject to grievance and arbitration, making them effectively toothless. (The AMPTP contests SAG-AFTRA’s characterization of several of its proposals.)

Academy Award winner Charlton Heston (right) shakes hands with the vice president of the Association of Motion Picture Producers (left) following the end of a monthlong SAG strike. Meanwhile, then president of SAG Ronald Reagan shakes hands with producer B. B. Kahane, April 8, 1960.



Then there are residuals, payments that have historically kept performers afloat during slow months or years, first won as a result of the 1960 actors' and writers' strike (which also won workers their health and pension fund). Cable and broadcast residuals — distributed for reruns and when a show is licensed for syndication — are considerable, sometimes comprising most of an actor's income. That is not the case on streaming platforms, which do not typically license or sell their shows.

Comer, who has appeared on *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, *The Office*, *The Reboot*, and *The Dropout*, used her own pay to illustrate the distinction. For her guest-star role on Hulu's Emmy-award-winning *The Dropout*, she was paid the highest tier of residuals. Had the show aired on network television, that would have amounted to \$3,664 for the first rerun, with continued payments for each subsequent airing. But because it ran on a streaming platform, she says she instead received around half that amount — \$1,863 — for Hulu making it available on an unlimited basis for a year.

On day one of its negotiations with the AMPTP, SAG-AFTRA proposed a new form of residual that would amount to 2 percent of subscriber revenue. Such an approach touches on a peculiarity of the streaming model: box office earnings and television viewership numbers made it easy to see just how

much money a television show or movie made, but how do you calculate the number of subscribers a particular project brings to a streamer? The studios refuse to help answer that question by sharing their numbers with the unions. Creators are left in the dark as to how many people watched their show; no one knows what constitutes success.

In the face of studio stonewalling, SAG-AFTRA proposed using a third-party success metric, created by a company called Parrot Analytics, to approximate streamer data; the AMPTP responded by raising questions about the company.

"It's not about Parrot Analytics," explained Crabtree-Ireland on *The Town*. "The only reason Parrot Analytics is in that proposal is because we know how these companies are about transparency, and we know that it's going to be a huge uphill battle to get any of the streamers to agree to provide actual data on viewership.... We said to them, 'We're not wedded to that one company or that one metric. The point is, we want a share of the revenue from streaming subscriptions, and we want it to be distributed to members based on the success of their projects.'"

Sitting outside Netflix, Comer, who has appeared in some of the past decade's most well-known shows, told me that she currently has around \$1,000 in her bank account and can't afford a needed car repair. Her cat recently died, and when he was sick, she had to ask friends to lend her money to cover the veterinary bills.

"I always believed that as my career grew, as the size of the roles grew, I would be earning the money to reflect that," said Comer. "But I don't. I'm still hustling, pinching pennies, and trying to figure it out. Which is why I'm ready to be on strike until we get a fair deal."

Glamorous Profession to Workaday Job

The transformation of writing and acting from a glamorous profession into a workaday job can be hard to wrap one's head around. How can it be that Alex O'Keefe, a writer on the hit show *The Bear*, lived below the poverty line while writing the award-winning series, attending an awards show with a negative bank account? How can a lead performer on a television

show — *P-Valley* star Brandee Evans — receive a residual check for \$0.01?

Hollywood has long been a money-printing machine, a site of lucrative if exploitative and uneven work. The odds of climbing the business's ranks have always been slim for writers and actors, but for those who made it, the payout was substantial.

Not anymore. Despite strong unions, the entertainment industry workers who are now on strike have seen their incomes and working conditions deteriorate in recent years. For writers, it's a textbook case of deskilling, the breaking down of a complex job into discrete tasks for which a worker can be paid less — nearly half of WGA members, no matter how experienced, are now paid at the contract's minimum weekly compensation level (roughly \$4,000 to \$4,500 for a junior writer on a show that has been green-lit and \$7,250 for a senior writer), up from around one-third in 2014. And with streaming, neither actors nor writers receive the residuals linear television offered,

leaving them without the cushion the industry's ups and downs require.

That's why workers say the question of whether they can hold out for a protracted strike reflects a misunderstanding on the public's part. Many of them have long had other jobs because they already couldn't live off their industry earnings. Plus, these workers are used to waiting years for their big break. They are well-equipped for a few months on a picket line.

"A lot of people ask me, 'Now that a strike is happening, what are you going to do to make sure that you can stay afloat financially?'" said Vanessa Chester, a thirty-year SAG-AFTRA member. "But this is not new. For the last three years and then some, we have been trying to figure out how to stay afloat financially."

Chester got her start as a child actor, appearing in *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* and *A Little Princess*. While many workers with three decades of experience

Actress Liza Colón-Zayas demonstrates alongside other SAG-AFTRA members in front of Netflix in New York City, August 18, 2023.



might expect job security or the ability to own a home, she says that those expectations are not borne out in the entertainment industry.

"People say, 'You're a veteran, you've got the stripes, you've seen it all,'" explained Chester. "Great, but I want to see the cash as well. Enough with the penny pinching and digging one hole to fill another. We know what we contribute, we know what we bring to the table, and we want the profits to be shared."

The question of profits looms over the strike, permeating conversations across a city that relies on the industry. (Even before SAG-AFTRA joined them, the WGA estimated that its strike was costing the California economy some \$30 million per day.) The studios have cried poverty in response to workers' demands, insisting that the industry is in a downturn, that these are hard times for everyone. The day before the actors joined writers on the picket lines, Walt Disney CEO Bob Iger decried the strike during an appearance on CNBC, characterizing the workers' demands as "not realistic."

The lament is hard to accept, given the messenger: Iger made the statement while attending the Sun Valley Conference in Idaho, known as "billionaire's summer camp"; a mountain was visible in the background as he spoke. He made \$15 million last year, down from \$46 million in 2021. Warner Bros. Discovery CEO David Zaslav received \$39 million in 2022, down from a mind-boggling \$247 million in 2021.

"There he is, sitting in his designer clothes, just got off his private jet, at the billionaire's camp, telling us we're unrealistic when he's making \$78,000 a day," said SAG-AFTRA president Fran Drescher of Iger in a conversation with Senator Bernie Sanders this summer. "How do you deal with someone like that who's so tone-deaf?"

The streaming model may well be unsustainable. Studios tried to imitate Netflix, but that company's ten-year head start meant Netflix ate their lunch, building a subscription model off the backs of their old shows, which it bought for cheap. It was the easy-money era, and Wall Street plied the studios with cash, helping them build faulty platforms. Shows proliferated, their number nearly doubling in a decade.

Now shareholders are demanding profits rather than subscriber growth, and the studios are responding to the pressure by squeezing labor. But workers, particularly ones as well-organized as those in the film and television industry, can only be pushed so far before they fight back. To expect otherwise is unrealistic, even downright delusional.

"They all chased Netflix, but Netflix lied to the public about what was possible," WGA negotiating committee member Adam Conover told me while walking the Netflix picket line. "Netflix said, 'For \$15 a month, you can cancel your TV subscription and have every show ever made, forever, with no ads.' That was a lie. We know now that they can't build a business that way. But all the other companies chased it, and it destroyed a very successful industry that people loved."

The workers don't see that error as reason to accept the studios' refusal to pay livable wages and benefits. The \$134 billion industry remains profitable. While Moody's Investors Service warned that the new WGA and SAG-AFTRA contracts, along with the recently ratified Directors Guild of America (DGA) contract, could cost the studios \$450 million to \$600 million per year, that is roughly equivalent to what Zaslav alone made over the past five years.

"David Zaslav knows how to make a fucking buck," said Conover. "Both things are true: the business has been profitable the whole time, and they're also in the process of realizing their folly and reinventing cable. It's a mistake to claim that the streaming experiment and its failures should have any bearing on our negotiations."

"It's as If Everyone Is Part of a Machine Assembly Line"

On arriving at Paramount Pictures studios on Tuesday, July 18, day seventy-eight of the writers' strike and day three of the actors' strike, I met writer Rachel Alter. She has worked on shows that include Starz's *Heels*, Netflix's *The Society*, and Marvel Studios' *Loki*. When the strike ends, she is supposed to return to work on season four of Netflix's *Outer Banks*. But that day, she was more concerned with her role as lot coordinator for the Paramount studios picket line.

"There are some safety worries in terms of the critical mass of people," she told me, referring to the influx of strikers the picket has seen now that the actors have joined the writers. "But that doesn't make us unhappy; it just puts us on our toes to make sure people aren't getting hit by cars and are safe crossing the street."

Alter joined the WGA in 2016, meaning she entered the industry at a time when the squeeze on labor was already afoot. Successful shows for which she wrote employed the “mini room” model for writers, in which a showrunner is tasked with relying on fewer writers who are restricted to shorter contracts. In negotiations with the AMPTP, the WGA is seeking guarantees for the minimum number of writers employed by a show, proposals the studios say are “incompatible with the creative nature of our industry.”

“There’s pressure to create a system that produces the same product but requires less money to produce it,” explained Alter. “Instead of having a twenty-week writers’ room where you write ten episodes of television, and those episodes are broken up so that it takes two weeks to write each episode — a week of brainstorming and outlining, a week of delivering the script — they’re now asking for ten episodes of television to be created by a room in ten weeks. And everyone on the staff except the showrunner is let go after that ten-week mark.”

Such an approach has one purpose: reducing production’s labor costs. Television writing is a

collaborative process, requiring a sense of security for writers that is precluded by gig-like conditions that force an overworked showrunner to produce what will almost inevitably be a poorer final product. That required sense of security to produce quality writing cannot be accounted for on a balance sheet, so it is ignored.

“Art suffers when you’re overworked and taxed this way,” said Alter. “It’s as if everyone is part of a machine assembly line: you give your contribution, and then you’re cut out of the process.”

“They chose to break the model and create this new one, and now they’re telling us, ‘Sorry, we don’t have the money to pay for it,’” WGA negotiating committee member Mike Schur told me when I pulled him off the Paramount picket line. “Plus, that’s not true. It’s not that they don’t have money — it’s that they don’t want to give it to us.”

Schur created *The Good Place* and cocreated *Parks and Recreation* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. He’s a prolific writer who has been in the WGA for decades, but this is the first year he joined the union’s negotiating committee. He says the reason for that is simple:

Jonny Gomez and Ariel Levine, both WGA captains and executive story editors for an upcoming Apple TV series, pose on the picket line outside of Warner Bros. Studios in Burbank, California, August 31, 2023.



“Wall Street would love for us to think that factory workers, delivery drivers, hotel workers, and writers and actors have nothing in common. But that is not the case.”

the industry’s new model will prevent writers from enjoying the opportunities he had, and he can’t countenance that.

“I would not have a career at all if the system that exists now were the system that existed when I started,” said Schur. After working as a writer on *Saturday Night Live*, he landed a job writing on *The Office*. He says that Greg Daniels, *The Office*’s creator and adaptor, took him, Mindy Kaling, and B.J. Novak, three writers who then had little experience writing long-form television, and painstakingly walked them through the process.

“Writing’ is a complete misnomer for this job,” said Schur. “That is where the companies are completely missing the mark and are ignorant of what it takes to make television. The job is not sitting at a computer, clickety clack. That’s 10 percent of the job.”

When I asked what the other 90 percent consists of, he offered a crash course in the profession. There’s brainstorming and rewriting, or realizing that a script sucks and throwing it away and starting over. There’s bringing the script to set and working with the actors and directors. There’s getting to know the set decorators and art decorators and production designers and grips and electricians and Teamsters, figuring out what they do and how they do it. There’s knowing when to delegate and when to take responsibility. Then there’s the process of getting notes — from studios, from networks — and knowing when to pick your battles.

All of that requires mentorship. Daniels walked Schur and Kaling and Novak through the job, and it allowed them to go on to become showrunners and in turn teach more people how to do it, who then went on to do the same, passing the knowledge down through generations. The mini room makes that impossible.

If studios no longer budget to have young writers like Alter on set, those writers will never see what it means to take words on a page and translate them into a television or film scene.

“The thing that drives me nuts is that this system has worked incredibly well for seventy-five years, and it has made these companies tens, if not hundreds, of billions of dollars of pure, unadulterated profit, because they have a free training system,” said Schur. “When the studios say, ‘You don’t need this many writers, the writers don’t have to be on the set, the writers don’t have to be in post[production],’ they are completely and ignorantly missing the whole point of how this machine has worked.”

“It’s *Jerry Maguire*: ‘Help me help you!’” he continued. “We are saying to these companies, ‘Do you not understand what happens to this machine if the writing is walled off from all the other aspects of production?’ Either they don’t understand it, or they don’t care, and either one of those scenarios is too horrifying to contemplate.”

As if turning away from the thought, Schur looked over to the picket line: “Whatever the model is, you have to account for money to pay writers, actors, directors, and everyone else who works on your shows. Because if you don’t, it is not a viable model. Because we’ll do this: we’ll stop working for you, and we’ll wait until you figure it out.”

“The Writers Are the Most Militant in Hollywood”

“Call us back in, have a real conversation with us, and get these proposals passed,” said SAG-AFTRA negotiating committee member Sean Astin, standing on a makeshift soapbox outside Amazon Studios in Culver City on July 19, day seventy-nine of the writers’ strike, day four of the actors’ strike.

Astin, of *Lord of the Rings*, *The Goonies*, and *Rudy* fame, is the son of a former SAG president, the actor Patty Duke. Holding a copy of the union’s proposals in his hand as he spoke to the crowd about the negotiations, he mentioned his mother.

“I’m proud to be standing in her ...” Astin said, pausing to find the right word.

“In her high heels!” offered one woman in the crowd.



Actor and SAG-AFTRA negotiating committee member Sean Astin speaks to a crowd of writers, actors, and Teamsters outside Amazon Studios in Culver City, California, July 19, 2023.

“In her legacy,” he concluded.

In addition to picketers, many of those listening to Astin had come from a rally outside a United Parcel Service (UPS) hub near downtown Los Angeles, part of a series of rallies the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) organized as the July 31 expiration date for its contract with UPS approached. WGA and SAG members turned out to the morning picket in droves to hear from speakers representing workers across Los Angeles, as well as IBT president Sean O’Brien, who updated the crowd on the fight at UPS.

“UPS is trying to get support in the community, but that’s not happening,” said O’Brien. “They’ve asked the president to intervene. But we’ve been very clear. We’ve stated our intention with the White

House: in the neighborhood that I grew up in, when two people are fighting in the street, you have nothing to do with it and keep walking.”

Entertainment industry workers’ attendance at the UPS rally was a sign of the strengthened ties among the unions: the Teamsters’ Motion Picture Division has provided invaluable support to the writers by respecting the latter’s picket lines, effectively bringing production to a standstill. At the rally, the actors and writers vowed to return the favor if the Teamsters’ 340,000 members at UPS went on strike.

“The entertainment industry is with you,” SAG-AFTRA’s executive vice president, Ben Whitehair, told the crowd from the stage. “Wall Street would love for us to think that factory workers, that delivery

drivers, that hotel workers, that writers and actors have nothing in common. But you all know that is not the case.”

Outside Amazon Studios, the Teamsters emphasized those similarities, from gigification to the threat posed by technology, all the way down to a shared corporate foe in the form of Amazon, whose workers the union is hoping to organize. Some of the Palmdale, California, Amazon drivers who joined the Teamsters in April, becoming the first Amazon drivers in the United States to unionize, attended both the UPS rally and the Amazon Studios outing. They were joined by not only other rank-and-file Teamsters but O’Brien and the Teamsters’ Motion Picture Division head, Lindsay Dougherty, too.

“You guys are leading the charge: the writers are the most militant in Hollywood,” said Dougherty. “You showed up strong, day seventy-nine, and I know you can go many more days. We have to get what you deserve, because you’re also making history for SAG-AFTRA and all the other unions that follow you. Our contract is up next year, and we’re going to need you, because we’re dealing with the AMPTP. The goal is to divide them like they wanted to divide us.”

“No One Is Running Hollywood”

It’s possible that the resolution of the current double strike in the entertainment industry will come as a result of the AMPTP collapsing, with studios individually peeling off and reaching agreements with the unions. After all, the AMPTP’s members spend much of their time trying to destroy one another; an organization that runs on consensus among the increasingly diverse set of companies, each with distinct interests and business models, is not a stable endeavor.

For now, union leadership is waiting for the AMPTP to agree to new bargaining dates. Meanwhile, the studios expected a writers’ strike but did not foresee the scores of actors and others joining them, and now they are assessing the damage inflicted. And the members are picketing, working around the clock to continue earning the support they have received from their counterparts across the industry: the Teamsters, IATSE, the Laborers’ International Union of North America (LIUNA), and the many other workers whose livelihoods have taken a hit because of the shutdown.

“It’s not, ‘I’m getting exploited, so you should be, too.’ It’s, ‘You’re getting exploited; tell me what’s going on so I can help make sure it doesn’t happen anymore.’”

“We are a labor pool; we just happen to be performers,” said Chester, the SAG-AFTRA member. “The actors have finally shown up to high-five the hotel employees, the UPS workers, the railworkers, the WGA, women in the exotic dancing industry. We’re saying, ‘I don’t know exactly what your struggle is, but I know someone is not treating you as well as they should. How about as we’re walking, tell me what’s going on so I can show up for you.’ It’s not, ‘I’m getting exploited, so you should be, too.’ It’s, ‘You’re getting exploited; tell me what’s going on so I can help make sure it doesn’t happen anymore.’ I’m ready to go to bat for everyone.”

“There used to be people running these companies who thought of themselves as stewards of the industry,” said the WGA’s Schur, reflecting on what led to the strikes. “They’d think, ‘I’m sitting in the chair that Jack Warner sat in, and I have a responsibility to the history.’ Now these guys are tech bros in Cupertino. They’re not people who care about Hollywood qua Hollywood. They are people who think that this is an industry with inefficiencies, and if they can eliminate those inefficiencies, they can suck out a bunch of money and then sell and move on in the same way they have with other industries.”

“Hollywood is very good at creating monsters, and people in positions of power very frequently turn out to be monsters. But the one thing those monsters had going for them was that they gave a shit about Hollywood,” he continued. “I don’t think that’s the case right now. No one’s running the town. You used to be able to say, ‘Who are the five people that run Hollywood?’ Everyone could reel off those names. But now? No one is running Hollywood.” ■

Christmas in July

When and where organized labor's been on the move.

AUGUST 8

Los Angeles municipal workers staged a one-day strike that disrupted or shut down a wide range of city services, from trash pickup to public pools, animal shelters, and parking enforcement. They accused the city of bad-faith bargaining and of perpetuating a recruitment and retention crisis, which they say has led to excessive overtime and vacancy rates as high as 40% in some departments.

Employer

City of Los Angeles

Union

SEIU Local 721

Strike length

1 day

Workers

11,000

AUGUST 4–PRESENT

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, almost 90 unions representing health care workers have gone on strike. The latest of these is ongoing in New Brunswick, New Jersey, where nurses at the Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital are fighting to end chronic understaffing.

Employer

RWJBarnabas Health

Union

United Steelworkers Local 4-200

Strike length

Ongoing

Workers

1,700



JULY 25

The Teamsters, under president Sean O'Brien, assumed a militant posture in their contract negotiations with UPS, threatening a strike that would have been the largest against an individual employer in US history. In late July, they won a tentative agreement that includes massive wage increases, especially for part-time workers, and an end to tiered employment.

Employer

UPS

Union

Teamsters

Negotiation length

4 months

Workers

340,000

JULY 13–PRESENT

UAW president Shawn Fain, whose slate unseated the scandal-ridden Administration Caucus in March, has brought bold demands to the table, pressuring the Big Three automakers for a 40% pay raise, a 32-hour workweek, and a just transition to electric vehicle manufacturing. With their current contract set to expire on September 14, UAW members at all three automakers overwhelmingly voted to authorize strikes.

Employer

General Motors, Ford, and Stellantis

Union

United Auto Workers

Negotiation length

Ongoing

Workers

150,000



JULY 13–PRESENT

In the first “double strike” to hit Hollywood since 1960, the Screen Actors Guild has joined the Writers Guild of America on the picket lines. The two unions share many of the same demands, including a greater share of streaming residuals and a hard limit on the use of artificial intelligence in the industry.

Employer
Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers

Union
SAG-AFTRA

Strike length
Ongoing

Workers
160,000

JULY 2–PRESENT

After their contract expired on June 30, Los Angeles hotel workers began a series of rolling strikes across 43 hotels that have shaken LA’s \$34.5 billion tourism industry. The workers are asking for pay raises that keep pace with the city’s increasing cost of living.

Employer
Hotel Association of Los Angeles

Union
UNITE HERE Local 11

Strike length
Ongoing

Workers
15,000

JUNE 23–30

Thousands of Starbucks workers at 150 stores walked off the job to protest a company policy that prohibited employees from putting up Pride Month decorations in certain locations. Starbucks also faced rolling strikes during the previous months, and in March a federal judge found that the company had systematically retaliated against workers involved in union organizing.

Employer
Starbucks

Union
Workers United

Strike length
8 days

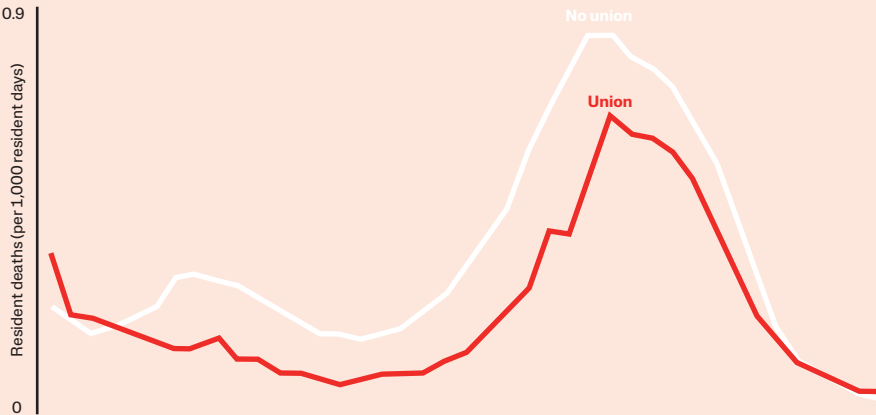
Workers
3,000



Doing Well While Doing Good

In unionized nursing homes, both patients and staff have better outcomes.

Unadjusted weekly nursing home resident COVID-19 mortality rates
June 14, 2020–March 21, 2021



JUNE 22–SEPTEMBER 5

Wabtec workers at a locomotive engine factory in Erie, Pennsylvania, were on strike for over two months, demanding higher pay, better benefits, and the chance to manufacture the company's new green locomotives. Though Wabtec brought in third-party engine-fabrication contractors to inspect the factory — a potential indication it was considering outsourcing the plant's work — the workers eventually won concessions on wages, health care, grievance mediation, and vacation.

Employer

Wabtec

Union

United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America Locals 506 and 618

Strike length

Workers

10 weeks **1,400**



JUNE 7-15

Postdocs and researchers at the University of Washington went on strike, winning higher salary minimums and stronger protections from harassment. The US secretary of education, Miguel Cardona, canceled his commencement speech at the university in solidarity.

Employer

University of Washington

Union

United Auto Workers Local 4121

Strike length

Workers

9 days **2,400**

JUNE 2-14

Workers at *Insider* emerged from the longest-ever digital media strike with significant wins: a \$65,000 salary floor, \$400,000 in health care reimbursements, guaranteed 3.5% raises, and more.

Employer

Insider

Union

NewsGuild-CWA

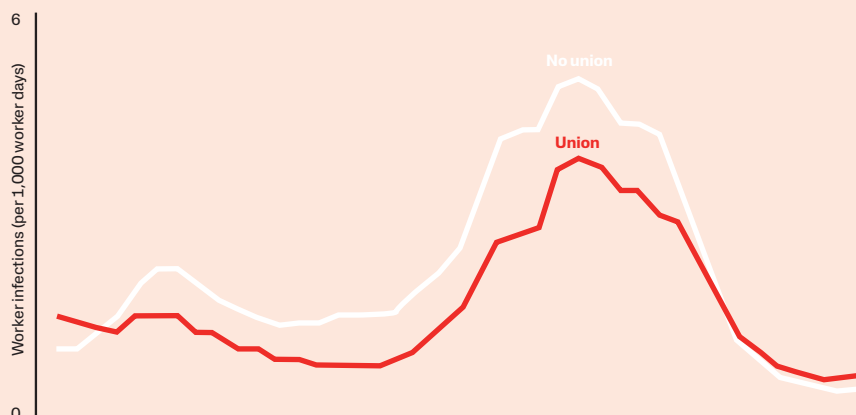
Strike length

Workers

13 days **250**

Unadjusted weekly nursing home worker COVID-19 infection rates

June 14, 2020–March 21, 2021



Of the more than 1.1 million Americans who succumbed to COVID-19, as many as one in six were nursing home residents. Those who care for them suffered, too: more than 1 million nursing home workers had tested positive for COVID-19 by April 2022, and more than 2,000 had died of the disease. The vaccine has no doubt done the most to lessen the toll of the ongoing pandemic, but labor unions have done their part as well.

In fact, unionized nursing homes saw 10.8% fewer patient deaths and 6.8% fewer worker infections than their nonunionized counterparts. Why? Researchers point to the safety regulations, paid sick time, personal protective equipment, and reduced likelihood of working multiple jobs that characterize unionized workplaces as major factors. Unions fight for dignified lives for workers — but also, in some cases, for life itself.

MEANS & ENDS



August 5, 2053

Hello [REDACTED],

You have a new statement available in your MyChart.

While we at Longevity Solutions appreciate the necessity of the editorial staff at the most important socialist magazine — perhaps in history — fighting off the perils of aging so that they may continue providing top-quality journalism to millions of readers around the world, your bill for services this past quarter is overdue.

Procedures that are not covered by your insurance policy and for which payment is currently outstanding include:

- Vitamin IV therapy (all staff): **\$9,984.43**
- “Blood boys” plasma exchange (all staff): **\$739,938.12**
- Hip replacement surgery (3): **\$124,039.53**
- Full vegan suppositories (all staff): **\$35,832.95**
- Neck lifts (2): **\$83,943.68**
- Experimental fecal microbiota transplant (all staff): **\$348,910.20**
- Forehead lifts (5): **\$25,811.34**
- Chemical peels (all staff): **\$5,073.93**

Amount Due: **\$1,373,534.18**

Date Due: **September 2, 2053**

We’ve received your inquiries, and while we understand that financing longevity can be difficult, we know that without outside support, Jacobin will be forced to cease operations at this critical juncture in history.

If you want to keep Jacobin tanned, rested, and ready for another decade, please direct your supporters to send checks to **Jacobin Foundation, 388 Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11217**, or donate online at **jacobin.com/donate**.

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Thank you for using MyChart.



**“Society cares about the
individual only so long as he
is profitable.”**

— Simone de Beauvoir

