ALL NEW DIGITAL MAGAZINE

The Nation's new Digital Magazine format offers:

- The Page-turning experience of a print magazine
- Live Web Links
- Multimedia Access

CLICK HERE TO VIEW IN THE ENHANCED READER FORMAT
Greta Thunberg, 16, is leading a global climate uprising.

ON MARCH 25, 2019

SCHOOL STRIKE 4 CLIMATE ON MARCH 15

MARK HERTSGAARD

THE CLIMATE KIDS ARE COMING

THENATION.COM
The Dangers of Amnesia

In his cover story “Who Is Matt Duss and Can He Take On ‘The Blob’?” [Feb. 25/March 4], David Klion misleadingly describes Barack Obama’s adviser Ben Rhodes as a critic of the “interventionist consensus” of the US foreign-policy establishment. Actually, as Rhodes explains quite clearly in his 2018 memoir The World As It Is, his worldview was shaped by books like Samantha Power’s A Problem From Hell, in which she calls for intervention against genocide. Rhodes was also deeply influenced by the Clinton administration’s failure to intervene in Rwanda, and he approved of the George W. Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq in 2003 and supported the very costly but totally futile Obama surge in Afghanistan. Moreover, Rhodes joined Power in pushing for action against Moammar Gadhafi in Libya. Finally, Rhodes felt the United States “had to do something in Syria,” and he urged Obama “to go big” there.

Strangely, Klion suggests that Bernie Sanders’s call “for an international progressive movement to combat authoritarian leaders and kleptocrats from Russia to Brazil” is another way of “challenging the interventionist consensus.” Klion appears to have forgotten that denunciations of foreign leaders such as Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein have been justifications for US military interventions and regime-change campaigns under Democrats like Bill Clinton, as well as for Republicans like George W. Bush and John McCain.

Progressives who cannot remember the past will be vulnerable to being suckered again, and they will not be able to effectively oppose the interventionist bias of the foreign-policy establishment.

David S. Foglesong
Princeton, N.J.

A Brief History Lesson

In “Striking Lessons” [Feb. 25/March 4], Sarah Jaffe writes that, in the early 2000s, United Teachers Los Angeles wasn’t the force it is today. Actually, an even more powerful contrast is with 1970, when teachers struck for the first time to win a 5 percent raise, smaller classes, and the creation of advisory councils. Their victory was short-lived, however, after the courts ruled that California law did not authorize school districts to engage in collective bargaining and nullified the contract. It was only in 1975 that the Rodda Act made such negotiations legal.

Walt Gardner
Los Angeles

No Nukes Are Good Nukes

Thanks to Bill McKibben for his profound review of new books about energy and the climate crisis “[Endless Combustion,” Feb. 25/March 4]. Yet I am troubled by the claim that Richard Rhodes, in his book Energy: A Human History, “argues persuasively that the risks of atomic energy have been overstated, at least when compared with the dangers of carbon.” No such argument could possibly be “persuasive.” A nuclear-power plant is many things, including, unavoidably, a factory for making the raw material for atomic bombs, a tempting target for terrorists and other malefactors, a disaster waiting to happen, and a producer of radioactive toxins so dangerous that they must be isolated from the environment for hundreds of thousands of years. And it’s not even carbon-free.

The magnitude of the climate crisis is infinitely great. But to see nukes as any part of the solution is, frankly, unrealistic.

Ed Gogol
Glenview, Ill.

Sign up for our new OppArt Weekly newsletter at Thenation.com/OppArt

letters@thenation.com

In the most damning testimony by a close associate of a sitting president since former White House counsel John Dean turned against Richard Nixon, Michael Cohen used his appearance before the House Oversight and Reform Committee to paint a devastating portrait of Donald Trump as a “con man,” “racist,” and “cheat.”

The former personal counsel to the president confirmed much of what Trump’s critics already knew. But his primary contribution was a sense of clarity regarding just how much trouble his former boss is in. We now have a dramatically clearer view of how this lawless president will be held to account. For those who have focused exclusively on the probe by Robert Mueller into Russian interference in the 2016 election, Cohen’s testimony may have been something of a revelation—one that opened new vistas of potential reckoning for Trump and his associates.

The Mueller probe matters in profound and, for the president, potentially ruinous ways, which is why the special counsel’s report must be made public upon its release: Its key findings will probably require follow-up by Congress and the courts. But as former New Jersey governor Chris Christie noted on CNN after Cohen’s testimony, “Bob Mueller is not what should concern the president or the White House. That would be the [US Attorney’s Office for the] Southern District of New York.” Christie, a former federal prosecutor who famously sent Jared Kushner’s father to prison, is no paragon of ethics or virtue himself. But in this case, he’s correct: Unlike the Mueller probe, investigations by federal prosecutors are not limited in scope, and, as Christie pointed out, Cohen and former Trump deputy campaign chairman Rick Gates appear to be serving as “tour guides” into Trump’s “business and personal life.” (Indeed, Cohen testified that he was in “constant contact” with Southern District prosecutors “regarding ongoing investigations.”) Journalist Garrett Graff has argued that the activities described by Cohen resemble the kind that have resulted in successful prosecutions under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act—something that the Southern District perfected in its fight against organized crime under former US attorney Rudy Giuliani, Trump’s current lawyer.

Ultimately, however, what Cohen’s testimony confirms is something that a number of us have been saying from the start of Trump’s tenure: The most important venue for holding the president to account must be Congress. Its work may be informed by the Mueller report or the investigations of federal prosecutors. But it must proceed from an understanding of the constitutionally dictated duty of the legislative branch to check and balance the executive.

During the first two years of Trump’s presidency, the GOP-controlled Congress impeded even the most tepid inquiries. Now the Democrats are in charge of the House, and on the case. “The American people voted for accountability in November,” explained Oversight Committee chair Elijah Cummings. “Mr. Cohen’s testimony is the beginning of the process—not the end.”

House Judiciary Committee chair Jerry Nadler took the next step when he announced that “we will be issuing document requests to over 60 different people and individuals, from the White House to the Department of Justice, Donald Trump Jr., [and Trump Organization chief financial officer] Allen Weisselberg, to begin the investigations to present the case to the American people about obstruction of justice, corruption, and abuse of power.”

On ABC’s This Week, Nadler said that Cohen’s testimony had heightened the sense of urgency on Capitol Hill: “He directly implicated the president in various crimes, both while seeking the office of president and while in the White House.”

Yet Nadler is not getting ahead of himself. “Impeachment is a long way down the road,” he said. “We don’t have the facts yet, but we’re going to initi-
ate proper investigations.” These inquiries will examine potentially impeachable offenses, including violations of campaign-finance law and other election-related abuses. Nadler said that “seeking [to] sabotage a fair election would be an impeachable offense.” He also said, “It’s very clear that the president obstructed justice…. He tried to protect [his first national-security adviser, Michael] Flynn, from being investigated by the FBI. He fired [FBI director James] Comey in order to stop the ‘Russian thing,’ as he told NBC News.” And Cohen’s testimony could now invite inquiries into subornation of perjury, bank and insurance fraud, tax evasion, and money laundering.

Holding Trump to account will not be easy. Investigations and hearings must be held. Witnesses must be subpoenaed. Some measure of consensus must be achieved. But make no mistake: The House that once shielded President Trump is now in the process of uncovering his high crimes and misdemeanors.

JOHN NICHOLS

*By The Numbers*

279K
Number of unaccompanied minors apprehended at the US-Mexico border since 2014

2,737
Minimum estimated number of children separated from their parents at the US-Mexico border since 2017

4,556
Number of reports made to the Office of Refugee Resettlement alleging the sexual abuse of immigrant minors while in US custody since November 2014

105.1°F
Highest temperature recorded in 2018 in Tornillo, Texas, the site of the nation’s largest tent city for detained immigrant youth

0
Number of staff at the Tornillo detention facility (out of 2,100) who underwent FBI background checks after the Trump administration waived the requirement

—Isabel Cristo

---

**Hamstrung in Hanoi**

Democratic hawks helped tank Trump’s Korea summit.

After President Trump walked out of his talks with Kim Jong-un in Hanoi over North Korea’s demand for an end to “sanctions in their entirety,” Democratic leaders were ecstatic. “I’m glad,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told reporters. “They wanted lifting sanctions without denuclearization.” In a giddy aside, Pelosi added that Trump had finally realized that Kim “is not on the level.”

Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer chimed in, declaring on Twitter that Kim’s deal “would have only made North Korea stronger & the world less safe.” Their response was quite a shift for a party that questions Trump on practically every front, from immigration to health care to Russia. But this was about North Korea, and Democrats have been cynical about Trump’s talks with Kim and the inter-Korean peace process from the beginning.

Even before Trump went to Singapore last year for the first-ever meeting between a US president and a North Korean leader, Schumer and six other senators warned that they would reject “any deal that explicitly or implicitly gives North Korea sanctions relief for anything other” than the complete dismantling of its nuclear and missile programs. In February, Senator Bob Menendez, the ranking Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, sent another letter attacking South Korean President Moon Jae-in for seeking sanctions relief to aid his push for closer economic ties with the North. Joined by Republican Senator Ted Cruz, Menendez demanded that Trump must ensure “the integrity of the sanctions regime.”

As if this weren’t enough, a week before the Hanoi summit, Pelosi arrogantly lectured South Korean lawmakers seeking support for their engagement policy not to trust Kim. Worse, she urged them to end a nasty quarrel with Japan over its war crimes during World War II as part of a misguided attempt to create a united front against North Korea. That led the speaker of the National Assembly—Pelosi’s counterpart in South Korea—to accuse her of carrying water for Shinzo Abe, Japan’s right-wing leader. Abe, meanwhile, was just as chipper as the Dems at the collapse of the Hanoi summit.

But the Democrats were hoodwinked into buying Trump’s explanation for his failure. In fact, the president and John Bolton, his national-security adviser, were extremely misleading about the deal they rejected. This became clear within hours of Trump’s departure, when North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho publicly rebutted Trump’s claims. In return for shutting down its massive—albeit aging—Yongbyon nuclear complex, the North, it turned out, had asked Trump to remove the sanctions imposed on the country only after 2016, not the entire sanctions regime. Kim, said Ri, had focused on five UN sanctions that “impede the civilian economy and the livelihood of our people.” Moreover, Ri announced that North Korea had been ready to offer, in writing, a permanent halt to its nuclear and ICBM tests. Even the Associated Press, well-known for its evenness in foreign reporting, had to ask of the sanctions: “So who’s telling the truth? In this case, it seems that the North Koreans are.”

President Moon expressed his disappointment with the outcome. Should Yongbyon “be fully and completely dismantled,” he told his National Security Council, “North Korea’s denuclearization process could be said to have entered an irreversible stage.” His foreign minister, Kang Kyung-wha, said Seoul would seek three-way talks with Washington and Pyongyang to jump-start denuclearization talks. Kim Jong-un, meanwhile, issued a conciliatory statement through KCNA, the state-run news agency, expressing appreciation for Trump’s “active efforts towards” results and vowing to meet again.

Despite this gesture, Trump’s final act in Hanoi made the situation even worse. After State Department and Treasury officials convinced Trump that the relief sought by Kim would give North Korea billions of dollars that it could pump back into its nuclear and missile programs, Trump came back with one of his trademark grand gestures and vowing to meet again.

---

(continued on page 8)
On February 13, Maria Ressa—the founder of one of the Philippines’ most successful news sites, Rappler—was arrested in Manila on cyberlibel charges over a story about official corruption. The authorities arrived at her office too late for her to post bail, forcing her to spend the night in custody. Rappler reporters livestreamed the arrest, sparking an international uproar over the state-sponsored attack against her and her publication. I spoke with Ressa about the culture of violence in the Philippines and the role of independent media there. —Noah Flora

NF: Could you talk a bit about your arrest?

MR: I was charged with cyberlibel. The actual case comes from a story that was published by Rappler in 2012. The irony, of course, is that that story was published before the cyberlibel law was even passed. The thing to remember is that libel has always been used against journalists by the people in power in the Philippines.

NF: In light of the charges, can you expand on how the Internet has been weaponized?

MR: Ninety-seven percent of Filipinos on the Internet are on Facebook—it is our Internet. What’s been happening is called “patriotic trolling”: online, state-sponsored hate that is meant to silence dissent. You organize attacks against a particular person to incite hate and violence. In our case, the threats have ranged from “Behead her” to “Kill her” to “Rape her” to “Let’s put all Rappler staff on a firing line” to “Bomb Rappler.” This is meant to achieve two things: It creates a bandwagon effect for anyone watching on social media, and it stifles your target, pounds them into silence.

The second way the Internet has been weaponized is through DDOS [distributed denial of service] attacks flooding our servers to cause a shutdown. Our payment platform for our membership and crowdfunding was attacked this way. And it’s not just Rappler—they are targeting all the news groups, especially the ones that have been critical of President [Rodrigo] Duterte.

NF: In your view, does Duterte pose a threat to democracy in the Philippines?

MR: Absolutely. The levels of impunity in the drug war—I’ve never seen anything like this. The Philippine National Police admit to killing 5,000 people as of December last year. And none of those deaths are being investigated. But what’s the real number? You would expect the government to give us those numbers, but they keep getting shifted. They admit that they’ve killed more than 5,000 people, but there’s a bucket called “homicide cases under investigation” that suggests more than 30,000 others.

And the target is the Filipino people. All this violence is meant to instill fear. Their message is, “Be quiet or you’re next”—which is exactly what a [National Bureau of Investigation] agent told one of our reporters while she was live-streaming the arrest.

NF: Do you have some gauge of how popular Duterte is?

MR: All the surveys suggest he’s extremely popular, with [approval ratings] vacillating between 83 and 88 percent. He’s perceived as the antithesis of the old politicians, who are always so careful about what they say. Duterte is a guy who says what he means. He’s one of the guys—very similar to Trump.

But what you also have to take into account is that these surveys are done in people’s homes, so what factor does fear play into this? That’s why we need to look at the methodology. I think most surveys tend to side with power when it comes to things like this.

NF: What’s next for you and Rappler? Is there still hope for critical, alternative media in the Philippines?

MR: Yes, of course there’s hope! Always! That’s why we’re fighting. This is a battle that we cannot afford to lose. We’ll fight this in court. Rule of law is the most important thing in any democracy, and it should be implemented equally, whether you’re perceived as for or against. And we are neither for nor against the government—we’re journalists! But we do hold them to account. The best part about all of this, if anything, is that it calls attention to exactly what’s happening in the Philippines. And we, as journalists, will continue to do our jobs.

All this violence is meant to instill fear. Their message is: “Be quiet or you’re next.”

Illustration by Andy Friedman
Udderly Ridiculous

A s usual, participants at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference spent their time railing against the socialist menace. But the focus of this year’s red-baiting was bizarre even by CPAC standards.

Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) told the audience that he hopes “to see PETA supporting the Republican Party now that the Democrats want to kill all the cows.”

And Representative Mark Meadows (R-NC) quipped, “With this Green New Deal, they’re trying to get rid of all the cows. But I’ve got good news—Chick-fil-A’s stock will go way up because we’re gonna’ be eating more chicken!”

Meanwhile, Sebastian Gorka, a former Trump White House official, warned: “They want to take away your hamburgers! This is what Stalin dreamt about but never achieved!”

This was all in reference to a leaked FAQ sheet from the office of Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) that mentioned that “farting cows” contribute to climate change. (Livestock is responsible for up to 18 percent of the world’s greenhouse-gas emissions.)

For some reason, this line gave conservatives visions of EPA stormtroopers raiding barns across the nation. The president of Liberty University, Jerry Falwell Jr., expressed his defiance: “I’ve got 100 cows. You just let Alexandria Cortez show up at my house and try to take my cows away.”

Ocasio-Cortez, a bit surprised, told The New Yorker, “Apparently, I am a cow dictator.”

Edwin Aponte

Katha Pollitt

A Mixed Year for Women

This Women’s Day, we’re celebrating one step back and two steps forward.

Did you know that you’re supposed to give women flowers on March 8, International Women’s Day? Teleflora is on it. What a comedown for a holiday started by socialists in 1909. Then again, every celebration of women, no matter how radical its beginnings—Mother’s Day began as a pacifist holiday—eventually devolves into an occasion for faintly guilt-ridden offerings from men and children. It’s as if they know there’s something seriously amiss, but can’t quite figure out what it is—so please, take these flowers and put them in a vase... and while you’re in the kitchen, do we have any of that nice cheese left in the fridge?

So what do women have to celebrate this year? Let’s have the good news first: Voters repealed Ireland’s constitutional ban on abortion and cleared the path to legalizing the procedure for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. The vote wasn’t even close: “Repeal” won men and women in every age group under 65, urban and rural, in every county except Donegal. It was a triumph of years of persistent grassroots organizing and, following Ireland’s 2015 referendum legalizing same-sex marriage, marks a major defeat for the Catholic Church.

Also, Chile legalized abortion for rape victims and in situations where the fetus has a fatal condition or the woman’s life is in danger, leaving Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic as the only countries in Latin America where abortion is totally banned, even to save the woman’s life (which is not to say it’s always available even where it’s legal).

More good news: Iceland was deemed the most equal country in the world for women by the World Economic Forum (the United States was 51st, between Mexico and Peru). And, unlike here, where women are always being told they’re lucky not to be living in an Afghan harem, Iceland isn’t resting on its laurels; it just passed the world’s first law requiring employers to prove that they’re paying men and women equally. Think what that means: Instead of having to prove discrimination—a lengthy process that can involve mandatory arbitration, losing your job, and getting blacklisted by employers in your field—the employer has to prove he’s fair.

Speaking of laws, according to the World Bank, in only six countries in the world—Belgium, Denmark, France, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Sweden—do women and men have equal legal rights in the workplace, and the US comes in at a mediocre 62nd. A half-dozen countries might not seem like much, but that’s up from zero a decade ago, so cheer up—just 190 left to go!

More good legal news: In India, the Supreme Court decriminalized homosexuality and ruled that sex with child brides is rape. It also ruled that girls and women of menstrual age could visit Kerala’s Sabarimala temple, from which they’d historically been banned because the god Ayyappa is celibate, and female sexuality is obviously disgusting. When more than a dozen women unsuccessfully attempted to enter the temple, one was physically attacked, lost her job, and was forced to live under police protection. In response, millions more formed a human chain 385 miles long(!) in support of gender equality. Two women then succeeded in entering the temple, but it was subsequently closed for “purification.” At least the law is on their side now, right?

Feminism, often derided by its detractors as a Western colonial imposition, has been breaking out all over. Lebanon, Morocco, and Jordan repealed laws that absolved rapists who married their victims. Saudi Arabia lifted its ban on women drivers—but put activists who’d fought the ban in prison, where they’ve reportedly been tortured. In a movement called “My Stealthy Freedom,” Iranian women are taking off their legally required hijabs and posting pictures of their uncovered hair on social media. In South Korea, women are campaigning for abortion rights (abortion is virtually illegal but flourishes underground, with possibly more abortions per year than births). Feminists there are also attacking the “corset” of rigid and elaborate beauty standards—hours spent daily on makeup regimes, and the highest rate of cosmetic surgery in the world (one in three twentysomethings has...
It’s not a Wheelchair...

It’s not a Power Chair...

It’s a Zinger Chair!

More and more Americans are reaching the age where mobility is an everyday concern. Whether from an injury or from the aches and pains that come from getting older—getting around isn’t as easy as it used to be. You may have tried a power chair or a scooter. The Zinger is NOT a power chair or a scooter! The Zinger is quick and nimble, yet it is not prone to tipping like many scooters. Best of all, it weighs only 47.2 pounds and folds and unfolds with ease. You can take it almost anywhere, providing you with independence and freedom.

Years of work by innovative engineers have resulted in a mobility device that’s truly unique. They created a battery that provides powerful energy at a fraction of the weight of most batteries. The Zinger features two steering levers, one on either side of the seat. The user pushes both levers down to go forward, pulls them both up to brake, and pushes one while pulling the other to turn to either side. This enables great mobility, the ability to turn on a dime and to pull right up to tables or desks. The controls are right on the steering lever so it’s simple to operate and its exclusive footrest swings out of the way when you stand up or sit down. With its rugged yet lightweight aluminum frame, the Zinger is sturdy and durable yet convenient and comfortable! What’s more, it easily folds up for storage in a car seat or trunk—you can even gate-check it at the airport like a stroller. Think about it, you can take your Zinger almost anywhere, so you don’t have to let mobility issues rule your life. It folds in seconds without tools and is safe and reliable. It holds up to 265 pounds, and it goes up to 6 mph and operates for up to 8 hours on a single charge.

Why spend another day letting mobility issues hamper your independence and quality of life?

Zinger Chair®
Call now and receive a utility basket absolutely FREE with your order.
1-888-831-4172
Please mention code 111399 when ordering.

Just think of the places you can go: • Shopping • Air Travel • Bus Tours
• Restaurants—ride right up to the table! • Around town or just around your house

Not intended for use by individuals restricted to a sitting position and not covered by Medicare or Medicaid. Zinger is not a medical device.

© 2018 firstSTREET for Boomers and Beyond, Inc.
Meanwhile, skin care has become a booming industry in the country, with $13.1 billion in annual sales last year and rapidly growing exports to the US. When we turn to political representation, the good news begins at home. Women made big gains in the midterms. The 102 women now serving in the House of Representatives represent the largest number ever, and it includes a record number of women of color, including the first Muslim and Native American women. But hold the champagne: Women still account for only 23.4 percent of total House members. The US does poorly when it comes to female parliamentarians, coming in at 78th, tied with Montenegro, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. By contrast, 50 countries have lower houses composed of 30 percent or more women.

It wouldn’t be right to end on a cheerful note, given the persistence of gender discrimination, violence, and oppression of every kind in every country in the world. So let me add that in Argentina, an 11-year-old rape victim was denied an abortion, although it should have been legal, and given a C-section at 23 weeks so she might produce a remotely possible viable fetus. Imagine putting a little girl through that. Pro-life! In Afghanistan, the Taliban is poised to join the government, which may mean fewer civilian casualties in the country’s ongoing war—but it will surely be bad news for women’s education, employment, and human rights.

I’m awarding the prize for biggest move backward to Russia, which decriminalized domestic violence that doesn’t break bones. Each year, 14,000 women are murdered in Russia, mostly by male partners. I’m sure that more than a few of those men bought flowers on International Women’s Day. There’s really no excuse, now that you can get them online.

North Korean captivity in a coma and later died, has given Democrats more ammunition to go after the peace process. “I will take him at his word,” Trump said about Kim’s assurances that he was unaware of Warmbier’s condition until his release.

In response, Democratic Representative Tom Malinowski, a former Obama official who in 2017 called for regime change in North Korea, introduced a congressional resolution to hold Kim personally responsible for Warmbier’s death. He later withdrew it at the request of the Virginian’s family. Still, a full investigation of the facts—which should include questioning US diplomats and intelligence officers as well as Warmbier’s doctors—might be useful to the public’s full understanding of what really happened to him during his captivity and the efforts that led to his release.

Overall, Democrats taking a hard line on North Korea should consider that no death should be used as a political weapon. Congress must join with South Korea in keeping the peace talks alive, so that we can bring an end to America’s longest war and help the two Koreas reconcile after 70 years of division and conflict. There really is no other choice.
Get the best of *The Nation* every day

Visit TheNation.com/newsletter to sign up for any (or all!) of our free newsletters. Don’t miss any of our deep reporting and thoughtful analysis.

Choose from:

- **NATION DAILY**
  The latest news and analysis, delivered every weekday

- **NATION WEEKLY**
  A roundup of our best coverage of the week

- **TAKE ACTION**
  Special activism campaigns from The Nation and our partners as they happen

- **TAKE ACTION NOW**
  Three actions, curated weekly by our editors

- **OPPART WEEKLY**
  Original political artwork from the front lines of the resistance

Stay informed and sign up today!

TheNation.com/newsletter

---

**CONTEMPORARY AND IMPERIAL MOROCCO**
April 24 – May 5, 2019

**CUBA: HAVANA TO TRINIDAD**
May 4 – 11, 2019

**NATIVE AMERICAN VOICES: THE DAKOTAS, COLORADO, AND NEW MEXICO**
May 12 – 20, 2019

**GREECE: ANCIENT WORLD AND CURRENT CHALLENGES**
June 8 – 16, 2019

**US CIVIL RIGHTS: ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM**
June 23 – 30 & September 15 – 22, 2019

**THE CHANGING FACES OF RUSSIA**
September 7 – 18, 2019

**IRAN: CROSSROADS AND COMPLEXITIES**
September 11 – 23, 2019

**BALKANS MOSAIC: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO, AND CROATIA**
September 16 – 29, 2019

**SOUTH AFRICA: BEYOND APARTHEID**
October 5 – 16, 2019

**JORDAN AND THE POLITICS AND CULTURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST**
October 20 – 30, 2019

For more information on these and other destinations, go to TheNation.com/TRAVELS, e-mail travels@thenation.com, or call 212-209-5401.
Activism at Google and Amazon paid off. But can the emerging “tech left” forge long-term alliances between janitors, drivers, and engineers?

AVI ASHER-SCHAPIRO
ON A THURSDAY NIGHT LATE LAST YEAR, A DOZEN OR SO PEOPLE GATHERED IN THE WOMEN’S BUILDING, a community center in San Francisco’s Mission District, to attend an employment-law seminar hosted by the Tech Workers Coalition (TWC). The group, founded five years ago, helps organize workers and trains them to ask for better conditions, treatment, and pay across the booming technology industry. This particular gathering drew an Uber driver, a contractor with Apple, a former Google employee, and two people from Square, the mobile-payments system. Beth Ross, one of the Bay Area’s fiercest pro-labor attorneys, and Veena Dubal, a labor-law scholar at UC Hastings, held court before the small crowd. “There’s a lot of solidarity to be built here,” said Dubal, who was dressed in business-casual. “A worker is a worker.”

Their talk was about how corporations routinely misclassify workers as “independent contractors,” denying them regular employment benefits and making it harder to organize—a practice that, per Ross, “undermines workers’ solidarity across industries.” Ross, who’s in her 50s, is best known for winning a multimillion-dollar settlement from a San Francisco strip club after it reclassified its dancers as free agents in 1994 and began charging them a nightly $125 stage fee. In a more recent case, the California Supreme Court narrowed the definition of what constitutes an “independent contractor,” which, Ross said, could present opportunities for contract tech workers to win a broader set of employment and workplace protections.

An intense speaker with brown hair and dark-rimmed glasses, Ross has the confident bearing of a champion litigator. Bosses in every industry, she said, try to cut costs by misclassifying their employees; the only difference between strippers and tech workers is “what they wear—or don’t wear—on the job.”

The assembled workers peppered the lawyers with legal questions and then broke into smaller groups to discuss their motivations and swap tales of abuse. The Uber driver wanted help organizing his fellows in an industry that he said seems designed to block collective action. “I never meet any other drivers,” he said. “I’m just on this app, dealing with these poverty wages alone.”

A coder who had just finished “boot camp”—where, in exchange for learning how to program, participants fork over a percentage of their earnings—wanted to know how to get out of the arrangement. “That sounds like indentured servitude,” someone muttered.

The TWC meeting, while small, demonstrated some of the biggest difficulties of organizing workers in the digital economy. Work-related grievances are linked yet frustratingly atomized; disparities in pay within a company can be as extreme as the ones in the world they inhabit. And as ordinary people around the world grow disillusioned with the power of Big Tech, the workers who keep the floors clean, the cafeteria stocked, and the servers running at these companies are struggling to find a common grammar to make sense of what they owe not just to their communities, but also to each other.

A major challenge for the emerging tech-labor movement today happens to be its biggest advantage as well: The definition of a “tech worker” is broad, almost to the point of being meaningless. Working “in tech” could conceivably mean doing anything on the Internet, or with computers or smartphones or anything that plugs into a wall. This, in turn, means there are far more potential recruits for the labor movement. But while software engineers and Uber drivers may get their paychecks from the same pot of corporate money, their experiences, problems, and approaches to solving them aren’t necessarily aligned.

This is especially important today, because somewhere between the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Google’s secret plan to build a censored search engine for the authoritarian Chinese government, and Amazon’s recent ouster from the New York City borough of Queens, Silicon Valley has lost its air of invincibility, opening up new possibilities for organizing in the workplace.

To take some recent examples: In late 2018, Somali workers at an Amazon warehouse in Minneapolis forced the company to the negotiating table. The staff at Palantir demanded that their CEO stop working with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency. Microsoft employees presented their bosses with a petition, signed by 300,000 people, to protest the company’s work facilitating immigrant detention. And the year was capped off by a massive international walkout at Google, accompanied by an aggressive list of demands that ranged from placing a workers’ representative on the board to overhauling sexual-harassment protocols. Wired called it “The Year Tech Workers Realized They Were Workers.”

TWC, an all-volunteer organization that lacks the structure or leadership hierarchies of a traditional labor union, is trying to ride this wave of dissent. With chapters in Seattle, New York,
and Boston, its members help coordinate labor actions across companies and mobilize cadres of workers on the inside. In the Bay Area, TWC held five separate events, including an introduction to the organization, a primer on labor law, and a forum to share workplace experiences—all in the first month of 2019. TWC welcomes employees of all kinds, from coders to janitors: As Moira Weigel recounted in *The Guardian*, the organization was formed in 2014 out of a friendship between a computer engineer and a cafeteria worker who set out to forge an alternative to the “Californian Ideology,” or the industry’s long-standing ethos of individualism and self-reliance. Over coffee in San Francisco, a TWC volunteer who’s worked as a product manager in Silicon Valley said the workforce he was part of is undergoing a fundamental shift away from an aspirational admiration for bosses and toward a deeper solidarity among colleagues. The volunteer—who requested anonymity in order to avoid retaliation from the companies he organizes in—believes that well-paid engineers will band together with lower-paid workers when they see the writing on the wall, noting: “They need to be convinced that the way contract workers are treated now, that’s how engineers will be treated in the future.”

This philosophy—that coders, drivers, and janitors can be corralled into collective action—is hard to square with the stereotypes of libertarian Googlers cavorting at Burning Man. It’s also hard to put into action for the most committed activists accustomed to more contained initiatives.

Thom Hoffman, a longtime driver for Uber and Lyft, has become one of the Bay Area’s most prominent rideshare organizers. “Collective action, unions, building workers’ power—these are the things that prevent individuals from being taken advantage of,” he told me recently by phone.

Hoffman, who’s in his 50s, has broad shoulders and speaks with a Midwestern lilt that inflects his acquired California slang. He’s the kind of rideshare driver that companies like Uber and Lyft would hold up as a testament to their own virtue: that they’re simply in the business of helping people make extra cash.

Hoffman says he took up driving to supplement an unsteady job working for a costume-and-prop company. It helped that he enjoyed the work. “Dude, I loved driving,” he told me. “I was pumping it up to everyone.” That all changed in 2016, when Uber and Lyft started cutting rates by staging a walkout company’s policies workers protested the change: Programming change: Google workers protested the company’s policies by staging a walkout in November 2018.

Hoffman’s theory of change is old-school: If enough Uber drivers decide to band together, the company will have no choice but to take their demands seriously. And he’s ambivalent about the white-collar kids identifying with—and trying to organize—the drivers’ struggle. “I wish them the best,” he says. Still, he’s focusing on mobilizing other drivers.

In the surface, Hoffman doesn’t have a lot in common with Meredith Whittaker. An expert on the social impact of artificial intelligence, Whittaker has worked at Google for over a decade, earns orders of magnitude more than the average rideshare driver, and recently co-founded her own research institute at New York University. She also happens to be one of Google’s fiercest and most active critics, working tirelessly to build internal resistance at the company.

Last year, Whittaker was one of a number of Google employees to pressure the company to stop working with the Pentagon’s military artificial-intelligence program, known as Project Maven. Such protests are becoming more common: In February, Microsoft workers went public to protest a $480 million contract to provide augmented-reality headsets to the US Army.

“We can’t have a company whose ultimate rationale is shareholder value making decisions about how to automate weapons,” Whittaker says. That applies more broadly than to Google’s drones: A workers’ movement inside Big Tech is necessary to inject social responsibility into the industry. At Google, Whittaker explained, the company went through the motions of listening to employees by holding town halls. Company message boards allowed employees to voice dissent internally. But to halt Project Maven, Google employees also had to go public in opposition to their bosses; some even quit in protest. “People conflated having a voice with having power,” she noted.

While Hoffman speaks of struggling to make the rent and afford his health insurance, Whittaker speaks of ethics and alliances. But both efforts—Hoffman’s organizing of drivers, and Whittaker’s solidarity-building inside Google—challenge the radical individualism that’s in-
formed so many Silicon Valley companies and organizations. And in the absence of meaningful regulation from Washington, combining these efforts seems to be the only hope of holding the Big Tech companies accountable.

Labor scholars say they sense changes afoot. “It’s true that a libertarian ethos has been overwhelming here,” said Harley Shaiken, a labor scholar who teaches at UC Berkeley. Shaiken predicts a reckoning between the implicit promise of working in Silicon Valley—helping to make the world a better (or at least more efficient) place—and its reality: building censored search engines for autocracies, enriching sexual harassers, and providing logistical support for family separation. “Many went into this field with a vision of the world, and that didn’t involve helping the Pentagon build drones,” he added.

“These companies made their names trying to change the world, but we examine the change and we think, ‘We don’t like it,’” Whittaker said shortly after helping organize a massive walkout at Google in late 2018. The precipitating event was a New York Times story about Andy Rubin, a Google executive whom the company paid $90 million to depart after he was accused of sexual harassment. “We are not going to play whack-a-mole with every new outrage,” Whittaker said. “What we are going to do is to change the system.”

The walkout proved to be an impressive show of force: From Singapore to Dublin, thousands participated, with more than 3,000 workers in New York alone. Management quickly conceded to one of the movement’s demands: to stop using binding-arbitration agreements in sexual-harassment cases. As Walker noted, “Collective action actually works to get change when official channels don’t.”

“The tech workers’ movement is here to stay,” says Will Luckman, an organizer with the Democratic Socialists of America’s Tech Action working group. “The question now is: What are we going to do with it?”

I met Luckman in a Brooklyn cafe a few days after Amazon announced plans for a new headquarters in Long Island City, Queens. Before long, Tech Action had convened a meeting of more than 40 activists and employees—many from major tech companies—at a community center in Manhattan. “Raise your hand if you hate Amazon,” one of the organizers said. When it was Luckman’s turn to speak, he posed a number of reasons that New Yorkers should be vigilant about an expanded Amazon presence. He also summarized just how central technology companies have become to perpetuating social and economic inequality, either through worker exploitation, gentrification, regulatory capture, or the development of invasive technologies and surveillance that tend, disproportionately, to hurt people of color.

That’s a lot to digest at once. And for workers organizing against Big Tech—not to mention casual observers and ordinary people who resent Facebook and Amazon—it can be difficult to grasp where the problem begins or ends. If Silicon Valley is responsible for high rents, loss of privacy, institutional racism, and low wages, how can ordinary people confront it?

Luckman and his colleagues suggested several ways forward, including canvassing neighborhoods and circulating a petition opposing Amazon’s anti-union stance. An explosion of activism and protests, from town halls to City Council meetings, followed—all organized by community groups in Queens.

What these groups didn’t expect was to see such quick results: Amazon abruptly cancelled its expansion, citing an insufficiently “positive” attitude from “a number of state and local politicians.”

Amazon represented a threat to so many people that it made itself a galvanizing target, explained Sasha Wijeyeratne, the executive director of CAAV Organizing Asian Communities: “The scope of this fight was unprecedented, and winning gives us so much hope.” The campaign thus showcased the potential for intersectional organizing against Big Tech: Amazon’s work with ICE enraged immigrant communities, its opposition to unions fired up labor organizers, and the gentrification it would provoke mobilized seniors and low-income residents in Queens.

It’s still unclear exactly why Amazon pulled out, but The New York Times reported that executives were concerned that the new headquarters was inviting too much scrutiny of its business practices. “We are changing the relationships between local officials, their communities, and tech giants,” Luckman told me by phone after Amazon announced its withdrawal. The alliances and momentum they built could be taken further; he was particularly excited about an ongoing union drive at an Amazon warehouse in Brooklyn. Some workers from that warehouse were active in Queens, too. “The lesson learned here is that collective action does work against these major tech companies,” Luckman said. “A well-organized group of community members can fight back—and win.”

That victory resonates outside of New York as well. “People are waking up to the impact tech has on our neighborhoods, cities, and democracy,” said Maria Noel Fernandez, the director of Silicon Valley Rising, which has been organizing against a proposed Google expansion in San Jose. “The current system of tech corporations subverting local democracy can’t continue.”

The solidarity driving the new tech workers’ movement can obscure some uncomfortable tensions. Engineers making six figures don’t just see the world differently from their service-worker counterparts: They’re treated differently, too.

Hoffman, the Uber driver, learned this firsthand back in October. Weeks before the global Google walkout,
Hoffman and a group of drivers decided to ramp things up a notch with Uber. Not only were they making a fraction of the money they’d come to expect, but the company’s opaque deactivation policies were causing some drivers to lose their jobs with no redress once their ratings on the system dipped. Hoffman said that drivers who didn’t speak perfect English felt especially vulnerable; riders would give them low ratings, misinterpreting the driver’s weak language skills for rudeness.

At the same time, the drivers were building a movement. When Hoffman first started organizing, the meetings would sometimes attract fewer than a dozen people. But recently, the Uber drivers had started holding digital meetings that people could dial into from the road—and by late 2018, Hoffman told me, the meetings were drawing dozens of new participants each week.

By October, the organizers planned to go to Uber’s headquarters to discuss drivers losing their jobs (the company can “deactivate” a driver at will). Hoffman never made it through the door: he got tackled by a security guard and slammed to the ground as he tried to walk into the building. He was holding a petition with some 5,000 signatures asking the company to meet with drivers to hear their complaints.

“I went into flight-or-fight mode,” Hoffman recalled. Pinned down under the weight of the security guard, with his shoulders and back ground into the pavement, Hoffman felt “a lot of adrenaline, so I didn’t realize until later how much it hurt.” Months later, he was still working with a physical therapist. (Uber has tried to distance itself from the security guard, emphasizing that he was an independent contractor himself.)

For veteran organizers, the contrast between how Google handled its walkout and how Uber dealt with the petition wasn’t surprising. “When management sees coders, they’re more likely to think, ‘These are our people,’” explained Jeff Ordower, an organizer for gig workers’ rights at Silicon Valley Rising, who was there when Hoffman got tackled. “When they see drivers, they think, ‘Wow—that’s scary!’” This is precisely why there’s such an effort in the tech workers’ movement to link their fates—or at least build solidarity. It was also the dominant theme at the San Francisco TWC meeting, where the Uber driver sat beside the former Google worker to learn about California employment law. This kind of solidarity has already been tested, with promising results: The battle over Amazon, for example, quickly united lefty white-collar activists with union organizers in New York. But it remains to be seen if it can be sustained and nurtured over the long term, especially in the far less sexy realm of community meetings and contract negotiations.

“In our perfect world, we’d have Uber drivers working with Uber engineers, fighting together,” an organizer at the meeting remarked. (There were no Uber engineers in attendance.) One optimistic TWC volunteer ticked off a series of recent collaborations between higher-paid and lower-paid workers: The group flew out organizers to help a Unite Here union drive for a series of recent collaborations between higher-paid and lower-paid workers at Boeing and Lockheed Martin aren’t exactly DSA recruits in waiting; they’re part of a union that forms a reliable node in the national-security state. What’s more, in the current tight labor market, tech workers may feel emboldened to make demands on their employers, but that momentum could easily wane when the economy cools off and workers become more anxious about losing their jobs.

Shaikan, the UC Berkeley scholar, cautions that cosmetic fixes could take the place of structural solutions. These aren’t necessarily unwelcome: In the past year, Amazon announced a $15 hourly wage for its warehouse workers; Google agreed to change its arbitration agreements; and a group of Facebook contractors—backed by their full-time colleagues—successfully resisted a move to fire them if they didn’t consent to a contract with less vacation time and fewer benefits than full-time employees get.

But just as Starbucks assuages public misgivings about inequalities in the international-commodities market by offering a branded version of fair-trade coffee, the tech giants will try to neutralize public opposition with partial gestures toward social justice—for example, more robust diversity programs for high-paid workers. “You always have to be on the lookout for co-option,” Shaikan said. The activists in the trenches aren’t dwelling on hypotheticals just yet. “We have a strong hand, and the drivers are behind us,” Hoffman said, noting that although they haven’t successfully squeezed any concessions out of Uber, more and more drivers are dialing into the weekly organizing meetings. “There’s a rumbling of defection against management in Big Tech, Whittaker told me. “They’re being pushed by a growing group of concerted workers—when it’s more costly to stay where they are, they will move in our direction.”

Back in the Women’s Building in San Francisco, momentum was building as well: The Square employees realized that Uber’s corporate headquarters is located in their office building. “Let’s stay in touch,” one of the Square workers remarked to the Uber driver as they walked out. “Let us know if you need anything.”

Alex Kane contributed reporting to this article.
A Progressive Populist From the Heartland

by JOHN NICHOLS

SHERROD BROWN might run for president. If the three-term senator from Ohio enters the race for the Democratic nomination, he’ll do so as a progressive populist with a record of winning in the industrial heartland that handed Donald Trump the presidency in 2016. But Brown is a much more nuanced political actor than his critics and some of his supporters recognize. He’s an expert on trade policy who is also an expert on voting rights; a Yale-educated author of distinguished books about the inner workings of Congress who has also been described by historian Michael Kazin as “perhaps the most class-conscious Democrat in Washington.”
I've been covering Brown for decades, and we've often agreed (for example, on media reform, stopping wars, and the vital importance of upending corporate models for globalization) and sometimes disagreed (right now, on whether Medicare for All should be a priority in the 2020 campaign). But I've always been struck by the ability of this former state legislator, statewide official, and member of the US House of Representatives to win elections as a pro-labor, anti-war advocate for civil rights and civil liberties in a state where the Democratic Party's more cautious contenders have frequently failed. We've talked politics often, so here's a sampling from our conversation after Brown took his “Dignity of Work” tour to the first-primary state of New Hampshire.

JN: Can you define what “populism” means to you?
SB: I'll first define what it isn't. It's never racist. It's never divisive. It's never anti-Semitic. It never gives tax cuts to rich people. It never plays off one against another—a worker in Bangladesh against a worker in France, or a worker in Mexico against a worker in the United States. What it is government being on the side of working families, regardless of race, regardless of gender, regardless of occupation...whether it's in labor law or the environment or consumer protection or whatever.

When you look at the phony populism of Trump—and of any number of politicians that the media, for whatever reason, have characterized as “populist”—that's not the real definition.

JN: So what is Donald Trump?
SB: He's the opposite of a populist, because he always looks out for the wealthy; he always looks out for the most privileged. And, just coincidentally, it's... him, himself, for whom he's looking out. I mean, that's who he is. And look at that cabinet: They're overwhelmingly plutocrats—they're overwhelmingly people who have made money because of their politics and because of their connections. They're people who always undermine democratic values.

JN: Trump is often described as a white nationalist. What’s your sense?
SB: Surely he’s a racist. People say, “Well, you don’t know what’s in his heart.” I mean, I don’t know what’s in anybody’s heart, really, but I know what his actions are. The actions were [such that] even the Nixon Justice Department filed suit against the Trumps on a housing-discrimination issue. We remember the Central Park Five ad he ran [calling for a return to the death penalty, after five young African-American men were arrested for the rape and beating of a jogger in New York—a crime for which they were ultimately exonerated]. We remember, obviously, him trying to discredit the first African-American president. We have seen his divisiveness after Charlotessville. We see him leading the charge on voter suppression. We see the anti-democratic, in-your-face combative ness—or worse—at these rallies when he calls the media enemies of the people.

JN: You’ve been especially concerned about his attacks on the media.
SB: It’s disturbing partly because I believe that the media are there to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable—and the media have saved our democracy in so many ways from descending into something that’s not so attractive. And we have a president who doesn’t believe in any of those institutions.

JN: You write books about American institutions, and about the issues they deal with.
SB: Yeah, first about Congress, then about trade, and now this book that will come out in October about progressivism in the Senate. I take pride in the fact that my name's on a book. I write the whole thing; I don't do “as told to...” It forces me to think more reflectively and introspectively about these issues.

JN: You come from Mansfield, Ohio, a historic industrial city. Do you think that’s why you focus so much attention on jobs, workplace issues, what you describe as “the dignity of work”?
SB: Yeah. My politics has always been centered in the dignity of work. My parents were not union members. But when I was in the legislature in my early 20s, when we were out of session on Friday, most Fridays, I would hang out at the steelworkers’ hall, Local 169 in Mansfield, or the UAW hall, Local 549 in a suburb called Ontario. And I just listened to workers talk about their lives. I've always done that, and it has informed how I think.

I mean, it's easy in politics, especially in the Senate, to surround yourself with like-minded people who have the same privilege you have. And if you do that, you don't serve the country well; you don't serve your voters well.

JN: You told me a story some years ago about campaigning for Al Gore in an Ohio factory. Some union members were talking about not liking Gore’s stand on gay rights or gun control. You said, “But I’m for gay rights and gun control.” They all looked at you like you were nuts and said, “Well, yeah, we know that, but you're on our side.”
SB: Well, you know, fundamentally politics is whose side you’re on. They knew how I fought on trade issues, on overtime issues; they knew how I stood with them when Congress tried to mess with unemployment insurance. Political scientists might [think Democratic candidates need to move to the center, or avoid certain issues, to win]. Consultants might. A lot of elected officials might. But I don’t see undecided voters that way. They’re always looking for the candidate who’s going to have their back or whatever the cliché is—be on their side, fight for them. I think those voters illustrated that.

JN: You have always identified as a progressive. Yet you haven’t signed on for Medicare for All or a Green New Deal. Those are vital issues for a lot of progressives. You’ve said, “I’m not going to take a position on every bill that’s coming out.” Why not?
SB: Number one, because I have my own proposals to make on climate and on Medicare, and my own proposals on taxes with the Patriot Corporation Act, which I think will be more comprehensive than any number of individual food items you might order off the menu—if I can mix metaphors....

I would say this, too: that if I run, I’ll be the only Democrat on the stage—regardless of
how many are on the stage, or the people that are thinking about it—who will have voted against the Iraq War, who will have voted against [The Defense of Marriage Act] and for marriage equality, who will have [received] a lifetime “F” from the NRA [after a quarter-century in Congress], and who will be pro-choice 100 percent over the years. And who voted against NAFTA. My progressive bona fides are well-known. They’re deeply held. I do them in a state where those positions are difficult politically. My position on guns probably has hurt me in my political career. My position 20 years ago for marriage equality probably cost me votes.... My position against the war was in the minority—surely in the view of my state’s newspapers and most pundits. My position on trade has been condemned by pretty much all of the media. And, as I said, I’ve done all of those issues in a political environment that might be a little harder in Ohio than it is on either coast.

JN: So where are you on health care?

SB: First of all, I want to help people now. And I know that Speaker [Nancy] Pelosi has a reasonably good chance of getting a plan for Medicare [eligibility] at 50, or maybe 55.... I think that’s good. I like the idea of expanding and building on Obamacare, not repealing it.... I want to get to universal coverage. I also want to do a public option. Senator [Sheldon] Whitehouse from Rhode Island and I wrote the original public-option language in 2009. I’ve been working on Medicare expansion starting with Senator [Ted] Kennedy in the late ’90s. So I’ve always worked toward that. I think we have a real opportunity, especially if Democrats win in 2020 in the Senate and the White House, to expand Medicare dramatically.

JN: You have a long history of opposing military interventions, going back to your high-school days when you protested the Vietnam War.

SB: That sort of ripened in 2002, when Bush was clearly about to go to Congress and force a vote with erroneous information—or, putting it more bluntly, he and Cheney lied. I organized with [Representative] Jan Schakowsky from Chicago night after night after night on the floor of Congress, reading letters, working with this new organization called MoveOn.org, bringing and sharing letters—she from Illinois, I from Ohio—on the House floor in opposition to the war.... When somebody from Cleveland or Toledo or Columbus or Akron or Steubenville would write to me, I would say, “Jane Smith from Gallipolis, Ohio, said the following.” We tried to build a movement that way, to make opposition to the war a lot more personal.

JN: You pay a lot of attention to what going to war means for working-class families.

SB: Yeah, I mean, politics far too often speaks with an upper-class accent, I guess, and the decisions to go to war are no different. I mean, they’re made by affluent people who have good salaries and good benefits—and, more often than not, the people who do our country’s fighting are working-class and poor kids who didn’t have the same opportunities, or decided that they needed the economic opportunity of joining the military, or they just wanted to serve their country. But I think people think more about defending their country than attacking in the Middle East. And so I’m always acutely aware of class differences and who does most of the fighting and dying in our wars. And it’s not usually doctors’ kids or CEOs’ kids or grandkids; it’s working-class kids from Appalachia or from East Cleveland, Ohio.... I guess the whole point is: We really need to consider who’s fighting our wars—and who’s left behind, who the family members are—as we make these momentous decisions, and don’t act cavalierly about sending somebody off to war.

JN: During the Georgia recount last fall, you said, “If Stacey Abrams loses, [the Republicans] stole it from her.” You said that as a former Ohio secretary of state who had run elections.

SB: Well, when I was secretary of state, Republicans were not hostile.... But that was then, and today we have a national Republican Party that’s hostile to voting, that suppresses voting, that changes the rules. And that’s not just in the South—it’s in the North, too. They purge too aggressively; they cut back on early voting; they don’t enforce civil rights. In Georgia, it was clear to me, having run an election system for eight years, what that secretary of state did and what Republican politicians around the country were doing. They can’t win on the numbers. Demographics are changing too rapidly for Republicans to win elections if they’re going to continue to appeal to race and anti-immigrant fervor and [employ] divisive, hateful rhetoric. If they’re going to do that, the only way they can win is by changing the rules. That’s how they win elections, and it’s clear in my mind that happened in Georgia.

JN: How will you decide whether to run for president?

SB: I think that the most important thing is to beat Trump, and I’ve got to figure out if my role is to be in this race to be the one to do it, or to just keep talking about our “dignity of work” message. Other Democrats are using that term, and that’s already a victory, as far as I’m concerned—because if Democrats start talking about the dignity of work, whoever the nominee is beats Trump.
BEWARE THE IDES OF MARCH, ALL YOU CLIMATE WRECKERS out there. The Climate Kids are coming, in massive and growing numbers, and they are not in the mood to negotiate. They know that you—whether you’re a fossil-fuel executive, a politician who takes fossil-fuel money, or a Fox News hack who recycles fossil-fuel lies—have put their future in grave danger, and they are rising up to take it back.

On March 15, tens of thousands of high-school and middle-school students in more than 30 countries plan to skip school to demand that politicians treat the global climate crisis as the emergency it is. Shakespeare made the Ides of March famous with his soothsayer’s warning in Julius Caesar, but ancient Romans actually saw it as a day for settling debts. What bigger debt is there than the theft of a livable future? At the March 15 School Strike 4 Climate, young people will call in that debt and, in the United States at least, demand real solutions in the form of the Green New Deal championed by Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

If you don’t know who Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg is yet, you can think of her as Ocasio-Cortez’s international climate-change counterpart. Like the rock-star progressive representative from New York, Thunberg is a charismatic young woman whose social-media savvy,
moral clarity, and undaunted truth-telling have inspired throngs of admirers
to take to the streets for a better world and call out the politicians, propagandists, and CEOs who are standing in the way.

Just as the 29-year-old Ocasio-Cortez torched the right-wing trolls who
laughably derided her as “stupid” after she introduced, with Senator Ed Markey, the congressional resolution to create a Green New Deal, so Thunberg, 16, has gained prominence partly from her blistering callouts of global elites. After riding the train for 32 hours to Davos, Switzerland, in January—for the World Economic Forum’s annual gathering, to which many billionaires and heads of state arrive in private jets—Thunberg told a panel (which included Gary Cohn, President Trump’s former chief economic adviser) that “some people, some companies, some decision-makers in particular have known exactly what priceless values they have been sacrificing to continue making unimaginable amounts of money.” A pause, and then a final thrust of the knife: “I think many of you here today belong to that group of people.”

When adults like British Prime Minister Theresa May scolded the strikers for skipping class, Thunberg replied by urging them to join the protest on March 15—in effect, calling for a general strike for climate action. “If you think that we should be in school instead,” Thunberg said, “then we suggest that you take our place in the streets, striking from your work. Or, better yet, join us, so we can speed up the process.” In Australia, labor unions representing teachers, firefighters, and health workers were a step ahead of Thunberg, declaring in early February that they would support the climate strikes. The National Union of Workers said of the students, “They are inspiring leaders, and we support them in making our political leaders listen.” In the United States, the AFL-CIO didn’t respond to The Nation’s request for comment.

The grassroots movements now taking charge of the climate fight consist overwhelmingly of teenagers and twentysomethings—people like Thunberg and Ocasio-Cortez. These young fighters are decidedly not your parents’ environmentalists: supplicant, “realistic,” and all too accepting of failure. They are angry about the increasingly dire future that awaits them and clear-eyed about who’s to blame and how to fix it.

Inspired by the high-school students in Parkland, Florida, who began protesting gun violence after 14 of their fellow classmates and three school staffers were killed on February 14, 2018, Thunberg decided last August to protest the Swedish government’s lackluster response to the climate crisis. With her round, serious face and light-brown hair braided into pigtails, she cut a quixotic figure sitting outside the Swedish Parliament with a handmade sign that said “School Strike for Climate.” Then a BBC reporter filed a story, which was shared on social media, and before long students as far away as Australia were striking, too. Now the inspiration has come full circle: David Hogg of the Parkland students’ March for Our Lives movement recently asked his 941,000 Twitter fol-

Heated protests: Student strikers in Hamburg, Germany, demand more action on global warming.

I don’t want your hope. I want you to act as if the house is on fire. Because it is.”

—Greta Thunberg, to Davos attendees

lowers: “So when are we going to start walking out against climate change in the US? We live on planet Earth too.”

In New York City, 13-year-old Alexandria Villasenor decided last December to emulate Thunberg’s example: Every Friday, she skipped her classes to occupy a bench outside the United Nations headquarters with a sign proclaiming “School Strike 4 Climate.” Now she’s among the leading organizers of the March 15 strikes planned in the United States. “We are calling it the ‘School Shutdown Strike for Climate,’ because our goal is to get so many students striking that we shut down the schools for a day!” Villasenor told The Nation. She has subsequently been covered by a host of news outlets, including CBS News and The Washington Post in a front page-story, where, like Thunberg, Villasenor skewered the absurdity of telling young people to prioritize homework over climate action. “If I don’t have a future, why go to school?” she asked. “Why go to school if we’re going to be too focused on running from disasters?”

The biggest student strikes thus far appear to have been in Australia and Europe, with journalists reporting that 32,000 students and supporters filled the streets of Brussels on January 24. Additional thousands rallied in Berlin, Munich, and smaller cities across Germany, Switzerland, and Belgium. In Dublin, striking students displayed an impressive grasp of climate science—particularly the need to stop releasing additional CO₂ into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuel—chanting, “No more coal, no more oil, keep the carbon in the soil.” Thunberg stated in an interview with The Guardian that there have been student strikes for climate action on every continent except Antarctica—70,000 strikers total by the third week of January. Meanwhile, she has continued to blast away at the complacency of too many so-called grown-ups. “Adults keep saying, ‘We owe it to the young people to give them hope,’” Thunberg said at Davos. “But I don’t want your hope…. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire. Because it is.”

Two groups that have supported Villasenor’s strikes at the UN—the Sunrise Movement and the Extinction Rebellion—are representative of the more militant stance that younger activists have brought to the climate movement. Most big environmental groups have traditionally been resolutely nonpartisan, focused on inside-the-Beltway policy fights and loath to explicitly call out corporate polluters, though Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, and Friends of the Earth are exceptions. Now, an array of youth-dominated grassroots groups are going directly after the climate-wrecking industry and the politicians it bankrolls.

(continued on page 26)
HOW DOES LOSING MEDICAID HELP YOU GET A JOB?

Arkansas is the first state in the nation to impose a work requirement on people receiving Medicaid. The results have been disastrous.

by Bryce Covert
By the time Steven Mitchell made it—by foot—to the Churches Joint Council on Human Needs food pantry in Benton, Arkansas, on a cold November day, his two hernias had him limping in pain. A few weeks before, he had received a letter from the state’s Department of Human Services informing him that his Medicaid health coverage had been cut off. This was the first that Mitchell had heard of the state’s new work requirement for Medicaid recipients, which as of June 2018 required many enrollees to spend 80 hours each month working, in school, or volunteering and to log those hours online in order to maintain their health benefits. Getting that letter “messed me up a lot,” Mitchell said, in a gravelly voice deeper than his young face would indicate. Before the state’s Medicaid program was expanded in 2014 to cover low-income adults without children, Mitchell didn’t have any insurance. He never had annual checkups; Medicaid has meant getting diagnoses he didn’t know about. “I knew I had a hard time with my breathing,” he said, “I just never knew I had asthma.” After Medicaid’s expansion, Mitchell got access to an inhaler and a breathing machine as well as pain medications for his hernias and other ailments. “It was a relief,” he said. “I got to get on top of a lot of things, and [it] helped me get a little better.”

Now he’s back to square one. Without insurance, Mitchell hasn’t been able to get any of his medications. He had an appointment with his surgeon to deal with the hernias just two days after I met him, and he wasn’t sure whether the doctor would see him.

But for Mitchell, working is far easier said than done. He’s struggled with hernias and asthma all his life. Each time he tries to work, he either winds up in the hospital or has to quit due to the pain and frequent doctor appointments. “I always end up paying for it in the end,” he said. “That’s the real thing that stops me from actually getting out to work.”

Mitchell has had a case pending to get on disability insurance for what he estimates has been two years. If he were to be approved, he would get monthly disability benefits in addition to being automatically exempt from the work requirement. But in early November, a decision still hadn’t come through. “On average, applicants for disability in Little Rock wait over a year to get a hearing.”

Outside the food pantry, as Mitchell prepared to set off on foot again in search of help with his utilities, he said he didn’t see the point of the work requirement. “No one should be forced to work if they’re not able to,” he told me. Health insurance “is just something that people need. The medication and getting these treatments is what will help us get back to work if we’re able to. Not having insurance, you can’t do any of that.”

In 2017, the Trump administration announced that, for the first time in history, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services would approve state requests to impose a work requirement on the low-income people who rely on Medicaid for health insurance. Arkansas was the first state to implement one. Starting in June, everyone age 30 to 49 who had enrolled in the state’s Medicaid aid expansion became subject to it, which meant that unless the state determines that they’re exempt—because they already have a job, a disability, or young children at home to care for—they must log on to a website every month to report their compliance in order to keep their coverage. If they fail to do so for three months in a row, the Department of Human Services cuts off their Medicaid coverage.

A number of other states, including Arizona, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin, are chomping at the bit to follow suit. Arkansas offers the first glimpse at the impact that a work requirement will have. The policy has only been in effect for nine months, but the results are clear: Arkansans are being thrown off of Medicaid in huge numbers. Meanwhile, unemployment in the state has hardly budged.

Since June, a total of 18,164 people in Arkansas have lost their Medicaid coverage because they failed to comply with the work requirement. It’s a staggering number, advocates say, given that the state had estimated some 38,000 people would fall under it. “I certainly expected people to lose coverage,” said Joan Alker, executive director of the Center for Children and Families at Georgetown University. “It is fulfilling my lowest expectations.”

Losing health insurance often triggers a cascading set of crises for former Medicaid recipients. In Tennessee, when 170,000 people lost coverage in 2005, residents received less medical care and saw their health worsen. The positive effects of expanding Medicaid, on the other hand, are wide-ranging and well-documented. Nationally, expansion has meant greater access to and use of medical care, improved health, and fewer deaths. It has also been found to reduce unpaid bills and medical debt and keep people out of bankruptcy.

Eight years ago, Donald Underwood was hit by a stray bullet. He lost his right eye and suffered serious brain damage. Since then, Underwood, a bright, balding man, has been hospitalized 27 times for schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, psychotic episodes, and seizures. He takes a cocktail of medications, including barbiturates, heart medications for arrhythmia, seizure medicines, a beta blocker, and an antiretroviral for HIV. They cost $12,000 a month; Medicaid pays for six of them. “Because of my medications and what I’ve been able to get through Medicaid,” Underwood told me, “two months ago, after nine years, I won my first game of chess.”

But now he’s subject to the work requirement, and in November was set to lose his coverage in two months. Underwood had no idea where he could possibly find work. He’s considered legally blind and has frequent seizures caused by his sensitivity to flashing lights, auditory input, and stress, making him an unlikely hire: “So I get a job, right? I hope they don’t have LED lights. I hope they’re not playing loud music in the background.” Like Mitchell and many of the other people I spoke with, Underwood has a case pending to get on disability insurance, but hasn’t been accepted yet.

“Every time my heart skips, I think about when I can’t get the medicine next month,” he said. He gives himself six months to live if he’s cut off from his medications. “I count on my health insurance to keep me living.”
The state defends the requirement by saying that with unemployment so low—3.7 percent in Arkansas as of December 2018—people who can work should have to in order to receive benefits. Those who don’t comply “don’t value the insurance,” Cindy Gillespie, director of the Arkansas Department of Human Services, suggested. But if the work requirement were functioning as promised, significant numbers of Arkansans would be reporting that they went to work for the first time after it was implemented. In January, just 322 people logged onto the website and reported work activities. And even among those, it’s impossible to know how many are newly employed or were already working, possibly under the table or for fluctuating hours that wouldn’t have shown up in state databases.

Jennifer Daniels would seem to be a success story. She got a letter from the Department of Human Services telling her that she would have to report work activities to keep her Medicaid coverage, so she went online to comply. There, she discovered that the requirement was as much about paperwork as about an actual job. The process was “frustrating,” she said. “They take you one step, then you had to do two or three more.” She doesn’t have a computer at home, so she did it on her phone, which took her about an hour and a half—a process she has to go through again each month.

Daniels has a paying job, but that was true long before the work requirement. The 42-year-old, decked out in a matching University of Arkansas Razorbacks hat and hoodie, has been working as a certified nursing assistant since she was 16, usually full time. Today, she works at a nursing home, a job she loves and held four months before the work requirement even went into effect. “There’s nothing wrong with working,” she said, but the reporting process is “too much.”

The work requirement is based on harmful stereotypes of the poor, advocates say. It “assumes people are completely disengaged and disconnected from their community, which just isn’t true,” said Marquita Little Nunn, president of the Urban League of the State of Arkansas. Nationally, Medicaid recipients are very likely to work, and those who don’t usually have a disability or other reason they can’t. Kevin De Liban, a staff attorney at Legal Aid of Arkansas, calls work requirements “termination traps.” They are, he said, based on twin myths: that the poor are lazy, and that the requirement will get them to work. “Work requirements do not address any actual problems faced by our clients,” he added.

Before the imposition of the work requirement, Arkansas was making major strides in reducing the number of uninsured residents in the state. The number of uninsured children had dropped from 7 percent in 2013 to 5 percent in 2017, and the rate of uninsured adults was falling too, from 24 percent in 2013 to 12 percent in 2017. Since the Medicaid expansion, advocates have been working hard to help people learn how to access care, particularly preventative services. But now that progress is being undermined. “Without coverage, folks are just going to revert back to that old way of doing things,” Nunn said. “I think they’ll just avoid it.” Mental-health providers face a particularly uphill battle. “Even on our best effort on our best day, keeping clients engaged in treatment is always a challenge,” said Kathy Harris, CEO of the Southeast Arkansas Behavioral Health System community mental-health clinic in Pine Bluff. Losing insurance makes it even less likely that people will come in for therapy sessions or take their medications. “They go without coverage, they go without health care, they don’t see a doctor, they don’t have medications,” said Kymara Seals, policy director at the Arkansas Public Policy Panel. “We’ve known people that died.”

Even for those able to comply with the work requirement, there are plenty of barriers to finding steady work in the state. In Clarendon, Mary Kensey, an enrollment specialist at the Mid-Delta Health Systems clinic, noted that the biggest one is the dearth of jobs. Most people who are employed work on farms; others might be able to get a job at the town’s sawmill or at the Belleville shoe factory in DeWitt, about an hour away.

According to Danny Stanley, CEO of the Southwest Arkansas Counseling and Mental Health Center, this is what he hears from the people he serves in Texarkana: “There are no jobs in southern Lafayette County. There’s no place to volunteer. And I don’t have transportation even if I did have a job.” Pine Bluff has a paper-products plant, a Tyson chicken plant, and a transformer manufacturer, but not much else. Assuming that a Medicaid recipient did find a job, it’s unlikely to offer health insurance, even though moving people from Medicaid to employer-based insurance is one of the stated goals of the work requirement. And even if it did, the Urban Institute found that the insurance would cost the average Arkansas minimum-wage worker more than 8 percent of her income.

There are even fewer job possibilities for a Medicaid recipient with severe mental illness. Those in treatment have to take time off from work regularly to go to their appointments—something a low-wage employer might not tolerate. “You can’t just do it like a broken arm, and it’s healed and life goes back to normal,” Harris said. “These are illnesses that are not going to go away.”

The state has been adamant that it won’t spend any additional funds to help Medicaid enrollees find work. There are existing supports for those who have to meet work requirements for food stamps, and some people are being referred to job-search and job-training assistance at the state’s Department of Workforce Services. But neither program has room to handle everyone who would be eligible. “There are no efforts here to support work,” Alker said. “No new resources for job training or child care or the kinds of things that would reduce barriers.”

This, advocates say, is evidence that the motivation behind the work requirement was not about jobs, but rather thinning Medicaid’s rolls. It wouldn’t be the first time that Arkansas has tried to do so. In its proposal to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the state also asked to reduce the eligibility threshold for people to enroll in Medicaid. (That request was denied.) In 2017, the state began requiring recipients to report any change of address and to respond to letters requesting verification of their addresses within 10 days or lose coverage, leading to around 26,000 people losing their Medicaid benefits.

In fact, Arkansas’s work-requirement policy is the latest stage in a decades-long project on both the state and federal level to make it harder for poor people to access safety-net programs—an effort that has taken on a new intensity under the Trump administration. In the 1990s,
President Bill Clinton championed work requirements for cash assistance, which were made more draconian by congressional Republicans like Newt Gingrich. Welfare, now known as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), is the only public program with blanket work requirements, but Republicans have been trying to impose them on other programs ever since. Former House Speaker Paul Ryan called the 1990s reform an “unprecedented success” when defending his own budgets’ massive cuts to safety-net programs. Ryan left Congress last year, but Trump’s administration has taken up his mission. In July, the Council of Economic Advisers released a report making the case for imposing work requirements on everything from Medicaid to food stamps to housing assistance. In an executive order last April directing federal agencies to look into imposing work requirements on their own programs, Trump asserted that these requirements “reserv[e] public assistance programs for those who are truly in need.” His 2018 budget called for encouraging work in “welfare programs” so that able-bodied adults who don’t work won’t “take…away scarce resources from those in real need.”

Despite such rhetoric, work requirements—to put it simply—do not work. Research has consistently found that poor health, including untreated mental illness, makes people more likely to lose their jobs, while health insurance helps them get and keep work. Medicaid-expansion enrollees in Ohio, Michigan, and Montana were better able to work once they had coverage; losing one’s Medicaid, on the other hand, doesn’t lead to any gains in employment. The same is true for TANF: The work requirement hasn’t resulted in increased employment, but rather in increased poverty.

Arkansas has told advocates that people who lose health insurance can avail themselves of free care at community health and mental-health centers. But after Medicaid expansion, the system was changed to account for the fact that people finally had health insurance to cover the cost of their care. As a result, many community health centers no longer have uncompensated-care funds to cover people without insurance. If they once again have to provide such care, they may have to cut services—or close their doors. And community health centers are no replacement for health insurance. They don’t fully cover the cost of prescription drugs, nor do they offer specialist care. “Referring out becomes the issue,” Kensey said. If her patients need an MRI, for example, they can’t get it done at her center, which means they’ll likely be on the hook for hundreds of dollars to pay for it.

Then there’s the fact that the Medicaid expansion has kept Arkansas’s rural hospitals from closing. Since 2010, the state hasn’t seen a single rural hospital close—unlike every one of its neighbors that didn’t expand Medicaid. Now, the stability of those hospitals is at risk.
understanding of this reporting requirement.” Danny Stanley hears the same thing from his clients: “I don’t have Internet access. I get this letter in the mail, I don’t really know what it means.” So they put it aside or throw it away.

“We’re taking for granted that people receive their mail on a daily basis like middle-class Americans, and that’s just not true,” said Mandye Davis, director of the resource center Jericho Way. Homeless residents, for example, may have their mail sent to day centers but don’t necessarily pick it up every day. “I’ve got a stack of DHS letters in there for people I haven’t seen in months,” said the Rev. Paul Atkins, who runs the Canvas Community Church. “Sometimes I can get a hold of them, but [some] are not findable. Sometimes they don’t want to be found.”

Reaching this population would take serious resources and time, but the state devoted no additional funding to outreach. Even those who received DHS letters didn’t necessarily understand them. “I have a lot of people that just come in with their letters [and ask], ‘Tell me what this means,’” Kensey said. Across the state, 14 percent of the population lacks basic literacy skills.

Even if a Medicaid recipient manages to find a job, reporting work hours or logging an exemption is mind-bogglingly complex. First, a recipient must have received the DHS letter, which includes a personal-identification number, or PIN. (Some of De Liban’s clients have reported being sent PINs that don’t work; others who never received the letter don’t have a PIN to begin with.) That PIN has to be linked to their health-care account—and that requires an e-mail address, something that many people don’t have. Until December 19 of last year, compliance could only be reported online—to save money, the state explained. (There is now a phone-reporting option.) That presented a huge problem, given that 18 percent of the population has no access to the Internet. (Arkansas has the second-lowest rate of home Internet access in the nation.) In Clarendon, most of the people who come to the Mid-Delta Health System don’t have a computer at home; there is one public library where people can use the Internet. Also, getting to the page to report compliance requires clicking through three other pages first—and the online portal shuts down every day between 9 PM and 7 AM.

Those who are trying to comply but struggle to do so have few places to turn. At the Department of Health Services office in Pine Bluff, a video about the work requirement played to a mostly empty waiting room. Narrated by a white woman in a red coat, the video claimed that “there are plenty of people willing to help if you reach out.” But it directed people to call the nonprofit Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care. No additional DHS staff were hired to help people navigate the system.

LaJoy Person is impeccably organized. When she arrived to our interview in November—her long eyelashes perfectly done, her honey hair the same color as her skin—she plopped down a stack of paperwork: bills, letters, receipts. “I’ve never dropped the ball on nothing that I need to turn in for my kids,” she said. “Never.” So when she got the letter about the work requirement, she went to a DHS office to figure out exactly what she needed to do. She was told that because her son was under 18, they were both exempt, and that when he turned 18, she would get another letter telling her what she needed to do to keep their coverage. Eleven days after his 18th birthday, on September 19 of last year, she received a letter saying they were both cut off. But the medical bills didn’t go away. After their coverage ended, her son, who plays football and basketball, received a bill for treatment of an inflamed knee; Person kept a physical-therapy appointment for her own neck and back pain—if she didn’t, it would have been hard to get another—and that cost her $200. She paid over $100 out of pocket for her pain medication. To cover those costs, she borrowed money. She feared that her stress would increase her blood pressure, which was already high. She was most worried about her son losing coverage, though that appeared to be a mistake: He should still qualify for ARKids, a state Medicaid program for children, because he’s under 19. “It makes me feel like I’m not good enough of a parent because I don’t have health care for my child,” she said.

Person spent hours on the phone calling various numbers to find out how to get their coverage back. She was repeatedly transferred among representatives and departments. She once got transferred to a supervisor whose voice mail was full. Then she was transferred to another voice mail, and another. No one she spoke with knew the status of her case.

It wasn’t until early December that she finally got their coverage restored. “It seemed like forever; it was a struggle and very stressful,” she said. She finally decided to go to a DHS office and refuse to leave, staying after hours with a supervisor until the matter was resolved. Eventually, the DHS staffer “said to me, ‘Mrs. Person, today you and your son’s health care has been reinstated.’ I cried right there on the spot like a baby!” she said. “That day, I got my sigh of relief—I got my peace back.”

Person still gets letters from the Department of Human Services about the work requirement that she finds “very confusing,” but she’s doing everything she can to
stay on top of the paperwork so that she and her son don’t get cut off again.

As of November, Jolene Seale had been clean for two and a half months; she should qualify for a work-required exemption for going into drug rehab, and reported that in August. But she didn’t have access to a phone in either September or October, while she was at the facility. During those months, “I didn’t even think about [reporting my status for] my work requirement,” she said.

She didn’t know she had lost her health insurance until after she left treatment; she went to pick up her prescription refills at a Kroger and was told that her insurance had been denied. “I cried,” Seale recalled. “I said, ‘Oh my God, what am I going to do now?’” She should be taking arthritis medication, a drug for her restless-leg syndrome, medication to combat a recently contracted STD, and psychiatric drugs, all of which were previously covered by Medicaid. The night before we spoke, she couldn’t fall sleep until 4 AM because she hadn’t taken the medication she needs. “I want to stay on my meds, because I’m trying to stay clean,” she told me. The lack of sleep can make her feel like she may as well get high instead. “I don’t want to do that… I need my insurance.”

Many Arkansans found out about the work requirement the same way Seale did: They went to the pharmacy or doctor and were told they no longer had health insurance. At that point, it was likely too late for them to do anything about it: After three months of noncompliance, Arkansas’s policy locks people out for the rest of the calendar year, so those who lost coverage last year didn’t get a chance to reenroll until January. “There’s really no reason for that,” said the Center for Children and Families’ Joan Alker. “It’s essentially forcing people to be uninsured for a period of time as a punishment.” As of December, fewer than 1,000 people had reenrolled.

That lockout period gets more punitive this year. People who lost coverage last September were able, in theory, to regain it four months later; those who lose it in early 2019 will go without coverage for the rest of the year. The pool of people subject to the requirement has also expanded: Though 19- to 29-year-olds were exempt last year, now they have to report.

There are some things that Arkansas has gotten right, experts say. By reviewing its data on who has a young child at home, who is already meeting the work requirement in SNAP, and whose reported income indicates they work at least 80 hours a month, in November the state automatically exempted 53,975 of the 66,628 people subject to the requirement.

A catch-all “good-cause exemption” could spare even more people. The homeless, for example, are not automatically exempt from the work requirement, but the state has indicated that they could get excused that way. Other potential good-cause exemptions that the state has enumerated include domestic violence, a birth or death in the family, natural disasters, divorce, and “other.” But the exemption, which was added at the last minute, is one of the most confusing parts of the policy. Advocates aren’t sure who makes the final decision about it. Between June and January, the state reviewed 904 requests and granted just 633.

When he got his notification letter from the DHS, John Rullmann didn’t read the whole thing. He is “one of the local homeless,” as he puts it, living in a forest by the edge of a river. His mail gets sent to the Vine and Village Church in an old gym in a strip mall. While he knows all of the places that offer free Wi-Fi—the church, McDonald’s, Taco Bell, a car dealership—he doesn’t have a phone to get on the Internet. As someone without a home, Rullmann could potentially request and receive a good-cause exemption. But that would require him knowing about the work requirement and figuring out how to ask for an exemption.

In order for the Medicaid expansion to continue, Arkansas’s legislature has to re-fund it every year. And state lawmakers have made it clear that the imposition of a work requirement is the price of Medicaid expansion. That puts advocates in a tricky place. De Liban argues that no matter how well or poorly work requirements are implemented, when applied to Medicaid, they’re simply illegal. Along with the National Health Law Program and the Southern Poverty Law Center, he represents nine plaintiffs who are suing the state, the federal Department of Health and Human Services, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services over the policy. Medicaid is “a medical program for health insurance,” De Liban pointed out. “Health and Human Services doesn’t have the authority to just, on its own, impose work requirements on a health-insurance program when there’s no basis for it anywhere in the law.” That differs from the laws governing TANF or SNAP food stamps, which do allow for the imposition of work requirements.

Would the lawsuit, if successful, put Medicaid expansion at risk? “The fact is that work requirements are clearly illegal,” De Liban said. “There are plenty of reasons to be able to justify continuing Medicaid expansion just based on its own merits.” But the Arkansas legislature may not agree. “I think it would be unrealistic to think that it will be easy to keep an expansion program if this goes away,” Numan said.

Since January 2018, 14 other states have requested the ability to impose their own work requirements on Medicaid. They would be wise to take stock of what’s happened in Arkansas. “Don’t do it,” said Numan, adding: “There’s no good way of implementing this kind of policy.” Even federal agencies are taking note. In November, the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, a nonpartisan legislative-branch agency, sent a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar calling for the department to hold off on approving work-requirement requests based on the situation in Arkansas. In February, Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Representative Frank Pallone (D-NJ) also wrote to Azar urging him to stop approving Medicaid work requirements, saying their concerns have “play[ed] out in real life in the State of Arkansas.”

Numan wishes the state had put its energy into helping people get the support they need to work, such as education, child care, transportation, and, of course, health care. The very idea of work requirements in Medicaid makes little sense. “Medicaid is a work support,” Alker asserted. “If you want to support work, it makes sense to expand Medicaid. If you want to stigmatize the program and [add] a lot of red-tape barriers, then do a work requirement.”
And they aren’t sparing their supposed allies. Last November, Sunrise activists welcomed the incoming Democratic majority in the US House of Representatives with protest signs demanding that Democrats “Step Up or Step Aside.” Next, they occupied the office of incoming House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to demand her support for a Green New Deal. The sit-in went viral after Ocasio-Cortez, likewise rejecting the wait-your-turn etiquette expected of freshmen members, joined the protesters. The mainstream media picked up the story, and voilà: The Green New Deal was on its way. For the first time, the US political class was discussing a response to the climate crisis commensurate with the scope and urgency of the problem.

Sunrise activists likewise got in Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell’s face—or tried to, at least—after he refused to meet with them to discuss his plan to sabotage the Green New Deal with a rushed vote on Capitol Hill. After allegedly being turned away from McConnell’s office in Louisville, Kentucky, on February 19, 17-year-old Destine Grigsby posted a video in which she blasted the man who has arguably been the greatest enabler of the Trump agenda: “[W]e’re gonna demand that [Mitch McConnell] look us in the eyes and he tell us that the $1.9 million he’s gotten [in campaign contributions] from the fossil-fuel CEOs is more important than my future,” Grigsby declared. On February 25, 42 Sunrise activists were arrested after demanding to see McConnell during a sit-in at his office on Capitol Hill.

But no encounter was more revealing than the Sunrise activists’ meeting with Senator Diane Feinstein, which attracted mainstream media coverage after the California Democrat corrected the assembled kids—“You didn’t vote for me”—and insisted that she wouldn’t endorse the Green New Deal because it couldn’t pass Congress. Feinstein invoked her 30 years of experience on Capitol Hill, insisting that “I know what I’m doing” and “Maybe people should listen.” Her mini-lecture summed up the problem perfectly: Like virtually everyone in the political/media class in DC, Feinstein doesn’t grasp that climate change has become an emergency precisely because she and the rest of the status quo have done so little over the last 30 years—and that humanity’s survival now requires nothing less than the transformative mobilization embodied by a Green New Deal.

As Ocasio-Cortez tweeted two days later: “Climate delayers aren’t much better than climate deniers. With either one, if they get their way, we’re toast.”

—Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
In 1985, almost two-fifths of the world’s population lived in countries governed by communist parties. From the Baltics to Vietnam, and from Cuba to Ethiopia, the destinies of 1.7 billion people were in the hands of organizations formally committed to the tenets of Marxism-Leninism. Yet within a few short years, this imposing global edifice had crumbled, as one ruling party after another imploded or was driven from office. Communist parties still retain power in a handful of countries today—most notably China—but it would be hard to argue that they remain communist in any deep programmatic sense. The transformation of the People’s Republic of China into the world’s second-largest economy, overseen by a party whose ranks now contain several dozen billionaires, illustrates the depth and scale of the change that has taken place since 1989.

In the intervening years, plenty of ink has been spilled in an attempt to explain both the phenomenal worldwide rise and rapid collapse of the communist movement. These accounts have varied in tone and ideological bent, from the triumphant autopsies produced by Cold Warriors and their successors—Richard Pipes’s *Communism: A History* (2001), for example, and Robert Service’s *Comrades* (2007)—to the more measured narratives offered by left-liberal historians, such as David Priestland’s *The Red Flag* (2009) and Archie Brown’s *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (2009). Within the remnants of the communist movement, there has also been no shortage of retrospectives and reckonings. But the common focus of most of these works has been communism as a living ideology and lived experience—for its opponents, a clear and present danger, and for its adherents, still potentially a new world in the making.

A. James McAdams’s *Vanguard of the Revolution* has a different remit, concentrating more specifically on the communist party as an organizational form. A political scientist at Notre Dame, McAdams argues that, above and beyond the many local differences in origins and outlooks, the communist party should be

---

Tony Wood’s new book, *Russia Without Putin: Money, Power and the Myths of the New Cold War*, was published by *Verso* in November.
understood as a single, globally recurring institution, its structures broadly replicated in a variety of places over time. Chronologically, the book takes us from communism’s inception in the mid-19th century to its much-diminished status at the end of the 20th. Geographically, we move from its German beginnings to the Russian Revolution and then outward across the rest of the globe, as if tracking the progress of a vanguard Weltgeist. Previously the author of books on 20th-century Germany, McAdams here adopts a world-spanning frame of reference, offering us a history of communism that ranges from Albania to China, Hungary to North Korea.

McAdams’s basic premise is that there is a tension running throughout the history of the communist party as a global institution: between the party as a revolutionary idea and as a political organization; between the movement’s ideals and the structures created to enact them. In McAdams’s view, this tension was apparent from the outset. Marx and Engels’s conception of the party was built around what McAdams identifies as two conflicting agendas: “One was based upon militant confrontation; the other emphasized organizational adaptation.” The same tension recurs, in one form or another, throughout the rest of the book, as the many national instantiations of the party try to keep these two components in some kind of equilibrium. But overall, the arc of the book traces the victory of organization over ideal—from The Communist Manifesto, where surprisingly little is said about the entity that will implement Marx and Engels’s program, to the ossification of the various state socialisms and their final shattering by 1991.

At the core of the communist movement’s long struggle to advance its agenda was the question of state power, and in Vanguard of the Revolution, McAdams is above all concerned with how wielding that power transformed communist parties themselves. Up until 1917, the possibility that communists would be in a position to govern an entire country had seemed remote, and for a long time, the tension that McAdams identifies between militant ideals and organizational structures remained a purely abstract concern. But the October Revolution posed the problem urgently and concretely—not just for radicals in Russia, but around the world.

Lenin’s The State and Revolution, completed a month before the Bolshevik seizure of power, famously evoked the withering away of the state apparatus, but it was unclear about what the future would hold for the party. In the early stages of Bolshevik rule, it remained an association of comrades, united in their commitment to a shared idea. But amid the maelstrom of the civil war that followed the revolution, a hardening took place—as exemplified in the crushing of the Kronstadt revolt and the ban on intra-party factions in 1921. Previously characterized by constant, fierce debates among peers, the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) became, in the mid- to late 1920s, a much larger, more bureaucratic, and more hierarchical organization; under Stalin, it was defined increasingly by its capacity to carry out directives from above. The mass purges of the mid- to late ’30s completed that transformation, literally killing off the party as it had existed prior to Stalin’s ascent.

A similar process took place, albeit in much less brutal form, in the parties that made up the Third International, or Comintern, founded in March 1919 to knit together organizations that sprang up all over the globe, from Western Europe to Southeast Asia to South America. The October Revolution made Moscow the obvious choice as the headquarters for this new revolutionary network. But that also meant the Soviet party quickly became the model that others were expected to follow, especially after the forward march of revolution in Western Europe was blocked in the early 1920s.

As the room for debate within the Bolshevik Party shrank, the Comintern’s national sections were pressured by Moscow to toe the line. Organizationally, too, they began to reproduce the Soviet party’s hierarchical tilt and, from the sectarian turn of the Comintern’s 1928 Sixth Congress on, echoed much of the dogmatism emanating from the Kremlin. But perhaps most damaging to the growth of local communist parties, the internationalist ambitions of the Comintern were increasingly subordinated to the needs of Soviet foreign policy. In 1943, as the Second World War lurched toward its endgame, the logic of that policy dictated the organization’s disbandment. To assuage the USSR’s wartime allies, Moscow called time on the world revolution.

After the Second World War, it was the Stalinized model of the party that served as the basis for what McAdams calls the “monolithic socialism” of Eastern Europe, the “people’s democracies” that led to the imposition of rigid one-party rule. McAdams surveys the fate of Eastern Europe’s communist parties in power, as well as the struggles of the parties out of power in Western Europe. As his account makes clear, in most of these cases, coercion was again used to transform existing parties, which often varied considerably in terms of both organizational structure and ideology, into Soviet-style chains of command. Though the rift between Stalin and Yugoslavia’s Josip Broz Tito was above all geopolitical, it was also, in McAdams’s view, born out of their fundamentally different approaches to party-building and the differing priority that each of them gave to ideology and organization. Yugoslavia’s expulsion from the Cominform—the Cold War-era successor to the Comintern—showed that, as far as Moscow was concerned, “dutiful states and not freewheeling parties were needed.” Tito’s maverick status was the exception that proved the rule: In the early years of the Cold War, the spread of the Stalinist model made it clear that other kinds of parties would not be permitted to emerge, imposing a leader homogeneity on what remained, nonetheless, a living global movement.

In China, the original tension between ideals and organization persisted as a central feature of the political landscape after the Communists’ victory over the Nationalists in 1949. Many of Mao Zedong’s actions in subsequent years are depicted by McAdams as attempts to sustain the party’s vanguard ideal and thus stave off bureaucratic stasis. Mao was “driven by the conviction,” McAdams writes, “that the organizational party should be re-infused with its original ideals.” Yet Mao’s “anti-institutional approach to leadership” had other consequences that were catastrophic for the country as a whole. The voluntarism that infused the Great Leap Forward—the idea that sheer revolutionary enthusiasm would be enough to overcome the structural weaknesses of China’s economy and society—contributed centrally to its chaotic failures and the ensuing famine, in which at least 30 million people died.

With regard to the party itself, the bursts of criticism from the rank and file that Mao encouraged proved hard to rein in, most notably during the fevers of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s; in the name of avoiding Stalinist bureaucratization, the Chinese Communist Party had almost been torn apart by a tidal surge from below. Mao’s death and Deng Xiaoping’s ascent in the late 1970s presaged a shift in the character of the CCP “from a party of revolution to a party of organization,” in McAdams’s terms—a shift that accompanied and reflected a wholesale change in ideological orientation. Deng was...
 WITHOUT ONLINE ACCESS, YOU’RE ONLY GETTING HALF THE STORY.

(SOUND FAMILIAR?)

As a reader of The Nation, you’re used to getting the whole story—not just the watered-down version delivered by the mainstream media. So why settle for anything less than the full story—get the online benefits included with your print subscription.

**FULLY MANAGE YOUR ACCOUNT.**
When logged in, you can renew, give gifts, change your address, and more. **INCLUDED**

**GET FULL ACCESS TO OUR 151-YEAR ARCHIVE.** **INCLUDED**

**GET PRIORITY POSTING PRIVILEGES ON ALL ARTICLES.** **INCLUDED**

**ACCESS TO DOWNLOAD DIGITAL EDITIONS.** **INCLUDED**

Simply go to: TheNation.com/register

To unlock your subscriber-only content on TheNation.com, visit the URL shown above, choose a username and password, and enter the account number that appears on your print subscription label (as shown at right). Activate your online subscription today; there is nothing to buy.
A different charismatic figure occupied center stage in revolutionary Cuba. In McAdams’s view, especially after 1961 and the announcement of Cuba’s socialist turn, Fidel Castro came to embody the revolutionary ideal, channeling it through his individual persona and frequently circumventing the party apparatus altogether with direct appeals to the populace. In the Cuban case, leader and party represent the two contrasting terms of McAdams’s analysis, rather than ideals and structure being in tension within the party itself. This is partly what makes the Cuban strand the weakest part of McAdams’s narrative. In its emphasis on Castro’s charisma, it leans on the overly familiar trope of the caudillo, framing post-revolutionary Cuban politics as a personal-ized struggle between Castro, the party, and the army, and thus neglects the revolution’s very real roots in the Cuban population. It is this substantial popular support, rather than the undoubted force of Castro’s personality, that really makes the Cuban case stand out within the broader landscape of communism in the Cold War era.

After Stalin’s death, ruling communist parties would make a series of attempts to renew their ideological energies and, in the process, re-establish their social legitimacy—but with only limited and temporary success. The year 1956 was a critical juncture for the world communist movement. In February, Khrushchev made his “secret speech,” setting in motion a process of de-Stalinization that was intended to return the party to its role as the embodiment of transformative ideals: The party was still, it insisted, the leading agent of revolutionary change, even in communist societies. That October, however, came the Hungarian uprising, a sudden, escalating challenge to communist rule that was suppressed by Soviet tanks after barely two weeks. These two moments encapsulated the contradiction in which communist parties were caught during Khrushchev’s Thaw: Some degree of opening was required to make the promise of ideological regeneration credible, but too much might open the way to excessive turmoil or even collapse. In the end, the see-sawing proved too much for the cadres of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), who in 1964 backed Khrushchev’s removal and replacement with a man more to their managerial tastes.

The Brezhnev era certainly brought an end to the Thaw and the halting liberalization of Soviet foreign policy—most graphically demonstrated with the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968. It also brought an increased emphasis on stability, both on the world stage, through détente with the West, and within communist parties themselves: Khrushchev’s surges of enthusiasm gave way to an organizational steady state. One well-known consequence of this much greater degree of continuity was stagnation in Soviet society as a whole, reflected in slowing economic growth and declining social mobility. Communist parties began to fossilize too, becoming by the turn of the 1980s what McAdams calls a “transnational gerontocracy.” At the same time, the ideological ambitions of these parties dwindled. This was the epoch of “peaceful coexistence” with the capitalist West. It also marked the end of global class warfare. While communism remained the ultimate goal, Soviet-bloc citizens were supposed to take pride in having arrived at “developed socialism,” as Brezhnev announced in 1977: a mature industrial society that was more advanced than Lenin’s fledgling USSR had been, and more equitable than capitalism could ever be.

Yet the idea that communists should applaud this vision of systemic consolidation raised a further problem. As McAdams puts it, “Was a Leninist dictatorship needed to achieve the goals of modest economic growth and national defense?” Something similar ultimately applied to Western Europe’s communist parties—notably those in France, Italy, and Spain—which from the 1970s on sought to build coalitions with liberals and social democrats in pursuit of a democratic path to power. The Italian Communist Party’s “historic compromise” with the Christian Democrats in the mid-1970s made a certain tactical sense, but McAdams argues that it had troubling implications for the long run: “Why should one support a communist party when more moderate parties on the left could be trusted to pursue similar objectives?”

Within the overall arc of McAdams’s narrative, Gorbachev’s perestroika initially appears as a belated attempt to reinvigorate the party after its prolonged sedation under Brezhnev. But Gorbachev was beset throughout by a basic and irresolvable contradiction: how to overturn decades of bureaucratism using the very organization responsible for it in the first place? In the end, he tried to have it both ways. While insisting that the party would continue to play the leading role, in 1988 he established a parallel institution, the Congress of People’s Deputies, with multicandidate elections that opened a path to ending single-party rule. What Gorbachev seemingly did not foresee was that, in downgrading the CPSU, he was removing the linchpin that held the whole Soviet system together. Once it was gone, the USSR quickly fell apart into its separate national components.

By 1991, of course, communist parties had already tumbled from power across the rest of Eastern Europe. As the tentative market openings that many of them had initiated in the 1980s accelerated into drastic neoliberal “shock therapies” in the 1990s, many of these formerly communist parties embraced the new consensus, morphing into advocates of the same kind of free-market liberalism being purveyed by Western European social democrats at the time. North Korea’s party, for its part, shifted to a more explicitly dynastic form of rule, while in China under Jiang Zemin, the CCP reformed itself as what McAdams calls a “servant of rapid growth.”

By the start of the new century, precious litt-le was left of the communist party as an ideal, and the only party organizations left standing seemed to have committed themselves to entirely different principles. McAdams cites Lenin’s famous February 1922 essay, “Notes of a Publicist,” in which Lenin compares party members to mountain climbers who, in the face of impassable obstacles, must sometimes retreat in order to find another way to continue their ascent. But by the end of the 1980s, there was no longer any equivalent to the revolutionary energies of 1917 to drive the mountaineers on: “Instead of searching for a new path,” McAdams writes, “the faithful left the mountain behind.”

Vanguard of the Revolution is a very readable synthesis of the history of the communist party, from Marx and Engels’s manifesto to the collapse of the USSR. McAdams handles both the global sweep and the local details of each case he covers with an impressive assurance and levelheadedness, all while keeping his distance from the tired Cold War polemics that usually surround this subject. Given the book’s sheer geographical and tempo-ral reach, it seems ungracious to quibble about things being omitted. Yet it is perhaps worth noting that McAdams’s predominant focus on communist parties as ruling parties somewhat skews his sample: It leaves out of the picture organizations that never attained state power and yet were politically and culturally significant. There is barely any mention, for example, of the Mexican, Chilean, or Brazilian parties—the parties of Diego
texts, how those adherents then adapted and transformed the vision of a particular communist party, and how the exercise of power altered both ideas and institutions.

Gramsci famously called the Bolshevik Revolution a “revolution against Capital,” since it took place in a country where the bourgeoisie had not yet overthrown feudalism and thus involved a leap ahead of the historical sequence that Marx had envisaged. From 1917 onward, communism continued to confound those earlier assumptions, making its greatest advances not in the industrialized capitalist world but outside it, in territories subject to colonial as well as indirect domination by European powers and the United States. This in turn meant that, rather than starting from the solid platform of wealthy Western European liberal democracies, communists in these countries were in many cases forced to wage long struggles for national liberation and only then build a new system from scratch, on the ruins of the old order.

In much of the world, indeed, communism as a global force reached its greatest extent after the Second World War, in particular with decolonization and the rise of Third World nationalism. But this apparent peak of communist influence coincided with the onset of the stagnation that befell the Second International in 1914, as its member parties succumbed to patriotic fervor and supported their separate countries’ war efforts. Yet the Comintern’s very centralization meant that it was too inflexible to deal with the multiplicity of national situations and experiences; and it also meant that it was liable to be swayed by the demands of the Soviet state, where the center itself was located. Over time, the interests of a single country took precedence over those of the world revolution; in the end, as Claudín puts it, the Comintern was “shipwrecked on the fact of nationality.”

Communist parties, of course, long outlived the Comintern, and their global spread reached its greatest extent after the Second World War, in particular with decolonization and the rise of Third World nationalism. But this apparent peak of communist influence coincided with the onset of the stagnation that led to these parties’ demise. Was there in fact an ironic connection between their success and their failure? Though McAdams doesn’t explicitly make this claim, it’s a question that hovers over the latter stages of the book: Were the features that made communist parties so readily replicable as organizational forms a hazard when it came to responding to the challenges of rule?

A book that traces as broad an arc as *Vanguard of the Revolution* is bound to contain many historical ironies. But perhaps the deepest one is not the victory of communist organizational form over ideology, but rather the fact that the solidification of party structures opened the way for a tremendous concentration of power in the hands of their leaders—subordinating vast collectives to a few key individuals. While structure may have won out over ideals, McAdams argues that it was
often a highly personalized structure, enabling all kinds of crimes and abuses to occur that critically undermined the legitimacy of the parties themselves. Stalin and Mao are his prime examples here, but smaller-scale tyrannies recurred elsewhere. In effect, over the course of the book we move from abstract revolutionary ideals as formulated by Marx to their enactment by mass party organizations, and from there to their embodiment in—and sometimes betrayal by—key individuals. The personalities of these individual actors not only matter for McAdams in understanding communism's decline; they were in many cases decisive, whether in forcing through harsh policies, prolonging their party's grip on power, or dooming them to ill-judged courses of action.

This emphasis on the role of individuals underscores another curious feature of Vanguard of the Revolution. For a history of the communist movement, it is decidedly non-materialist—idealist, even—centering as it does on the emergence, growth, and steady entombment of a set of beliefs. To be sure, this is a legitimate choice of approach, and no historical account can do everything. But the relative absence of a material substrate in McAdams's narrative—a concrete sense of communist countries' respective positions within the global economy, or the very real structural obstacles facing any attempt to enact social change on the dramatic scale that communism intended—means that the forces shaping these parties' policy shifts often remain somewhat opaque. Individuals and ideas were indeed crucial, as McAdams stresses. But they interacted with, and were partially formed by, constraints imposed by the capitalist order against which communists rebelled.

In the end, McAdams's narrative remains an enigmatic ghost story: A specter takes on solid form and haunts the world, before conjuring itself out of existence. But that vanishing act was not the work of communist parties or ideas alone, nor was it the inevitable consequence of organizational entropy or ideological exhaustion. There were material factors at play, which efforts of will by themselves could not overcome. Answers to the riddle of communism's rise and fall will therefore need to be sought not only in the varying fortunes of the movement itself, but in the stubborn resistance of the world that communism sought to change. At a moment when whole swaths of the left are debating with renewed energy and concreteness the question of alternatives to capitalism, it seems especially important to hold both sides of that picture in focus.

In the Russian novel The Master and Margarita by Mikhail Bulgakov, the Devil comes to 1930s Moscow and wreaks havoc on the lives of the city's literati. A talented writer, known as "the Master," feels trapped in a world of ideologically pure but talentless hacks and throws his manuscript into a fire. Bulgakov had done just that in 1930: Believing it impossible to exist as a writer under Stalin's repressive regime, he burned the first draft of the novel. Later in the story, the Master is visited by the Devil, who returns the book, undamaged. "Manuscripts don't burn," he tells the Master.

In many ways, this sentiment—a belief in the resilience of stories to survive anything, even physical destruction—underpins Susan Orlean's new work of nonfiction, The Library Book. It tells the story of the 1986 fire that ravaged the central branch of the Los Angeles Public Library: the largest library fire in US history, with over 1 million books damaged or destroyed, not to mention magazines, documents, and rare photographs of early LA. One librarian told Orlean that she could smell "the syrupy odor" of burning microfilm from outside as she watched the firefighters try to put out the blaze. Four hundred thousand books burned in the fire, but through Orlean's
masterful retelling, the stories that once filled Central Library have, much like the Master's manuscript, risen from the ashes.

Fire investigators very quickly eschewed the usual suspects—lit cigarettes and bad wiring—and determined that it was an act of arson. Yet who in a city that had largely stopped caring about the downtown neighborhood, where the Central Library was located, would set fire to it? Why destroy half a million books when, to quote Frank Ocean, “you got the beach”? The investigators eventually settled on a handsome young out-of-work actor named Harry Peak, who seemed confessing to setting the fire, but not everyone was convinced. Maybe he just wanted people to think he’d done it, telling an exciting story that would make him feel famous, even if only among his friends. Throwing herself into uncovering the mysteries of this story, Orlean finds that the real burning question at the heart of the arson case had less to do with Peak than with Los Angeles and the desire for celebrity that beckons so many people to it.

Orlean, who’s been a staff writer for The New Yorker since 1992, is not new to crime writing. Her 1998 book, The Orchid Thief, told the story of a South Florida man named John Laroche, who had been arrested four years earlier for poaching rare orchids in the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. The Orchid Thief was adapted by the screenwriter Charlie Kaufman into the film Adaptation (2002), which dramatized Kaufman’s struggle to create a linear narrative from Orlean’s “sprawling New Yorker shit” (as the Kaufman character in the movie, played Nicolas Cage, puts it).

The Library Book, like the city in which it is set, does sprawl, but in the best possible way, touching on everything from the politics of book burning to the physics of combustion to the future of brick-and-mortar libraries in a digital world. She never fully resolves the mystery behind the arson, or whether Harry Peak did or did not commit it. Yet she does uncover many other stories along the way. While The Library Book flirts with the genre of true crime, in the end it is really a book about Los Angeles and the burning ambition of the people—Harry Peak among them—who flock to it.

Peak’s family moved to California from Missouri in the 1940s. Like many people who move west, even today, they were searching for something. “California seemed like a promise,” Orlean writes of the Peaks. After dropping out of high school, Harry’s father found work on the assembly line of a Los Angeles aerospace manufacturer that eventually serviced the Space Shuttle program. While the Peaks lived just 15 miles southwest of Los Angeles, their working-class community was worlds away from the glitz and glamour of the big city, and young Harry dreamed of escaping it.

Attractive, blond, and troubled, Peak found that when he did escape to LA, he fit right in. Sharing “a house in Hollywood with a few other young men grasping at the tatterer edges of show business,” he took plenty of odd jobs, all of which he was terrible at. On his first day as a valet at the Sheraton Hotel, Peak forgot where he’d parked a guest’s car. Even when it came to his main ambition—to be an actor—he had bad luck: Once he started auditioning, he soon discovered that he suffered from terrible stage fright.

But Peak was good at something: making friends, an essential skill in a city where your big break might come at a house party (in fact, my former roommate signed a modeling contract after attending a new friend’s Andy Warhol–themed costume party in LA). Peak was also good at something else that should have come in handy in a town built on fabulism: As his acquaintances from those days reported to Orlean, he was a compulsive liar. He lied about having a part on a medical show, “maybe General Hospital,” his dad thought. He lied about having drinks with Cher. He claimed to be close friends with Burt Reynolds. Orlean recounts that he told this one often and with relish, especially to his friends and relatives back home: “Harry’s supposed friendship with Burt Reynolds had the power of legend in his family.”

That’s why no one took him seriously when Peak got drunk and said that he’d set the public library on fire. One friend said he “couldn’t picture Harry at a library” because “he couldn’t recall ever seeing Harry read a book,” and at first, the police, who’d received a tip from someone claiming that Peak resembled the composite sketch of the arsonist shown on TV, also thought that he likely had nothing to do with it. He had no connection to anyone at the library, and he failed to stand out in any way—a sad thing, really, for someone who wanted to be a movie star. To the police, Orlean writes, he seemed “like just another one of the thousands of young men who churn through Los Angeles, job-hopping, tumbling from one apartment to another, a little feckless and starry-eyed, lifted by the continuous supply of hope and sun.”

Orlean had never heard of the Central Library fire when she moved to Los Angeles in 2011. There had been little in the papers about it even at the time, though perhaps understandably so: The Chernobyl disaster, Orlean reminds us, had unfolded just days prior, and the possible end of days left little column space for a local fire, no matter how significant. A chance encounter with Ken Brecher, head of the nonprofit Library Foundation of Los Angeles, led to his giving her a tour of Central Library and its history several days later. While they roamed the stacks together, Brecher took a sniff of one of the books and remarked that he could “still smell the smoke.” Confused, Orlean asked if patrons were allowed to smoke cigarettes inside the library. When Brecher explained that the smell was from “the fire,” Orlean’s interest was piqued. “What fire?” she asked—and thus began her quest to get to the bottom of a mystery that baffled law enforcement and had burned a sizable hole in the collections of what is now the third-largest central library in the country.

As with The Orchid Thief, Orlean was never only interested in the story of Peak and the fire itself; in fact, the mystery surrounding the arson merely holds together the many and varied constituent parts of a narrative that swings from the early days of the Los Angeles Public Library system and the eccentric cast of characters—veritable celebrities in their own right—who have served as director over the years to the herculean efforts of John Szabo, the current head of the system, and his tireless efforts to turn Central Library into a place where the city’s most vulnerable can gain access to key social services and benefits.

Along the way, Orlean also delves into a variety of other topics. Her inquisitive mind moves in the opposite direction from a police procedural. She’s not trying to narrow down the suspects; she’s expanding the scope of her inquiry all the way back to the nearly mythic fire that destroyed the Library of Alexandria, with detours examining the struggle to integrate libraries in Atlanta and the history of book burning, especially during wars. “Destroying a culture’s books,” Orlean says on this last point, “is sentencing it to something worse than death: It is sentencing it to seem as if it never lived.”
The Second Baby Explains the Unthinkable

You feared that you would love my brother more. But terribly, you would love each new child as you love him, with proprioceptive selfishness; you could grow a new child each year like a new tender limb budding from your body. Love does not spread thin; it is not time, to be allotted, not food, to be shared until the plate is empty. That dream in which your house grows extra rooms to hold the books you have never written? That is love; and like the dream you cannot choose when it comes; you are a tangle of ganglions and you will fire. You are as boring as dawn: we knew with precision that the sun would rise at 6:44 AM and that your child would be to you another limb, capable of pleasure, strength, pain. So the morning sky was clear; so my eyes for the moment are blue; these are incidentals of light. You are only the next of billions to feel in your body the shock of your baby’s first breath. You can imagine the dislocation of the shoulder, your arm visibly out of true. Now think of your body if I were taken. Think of me absent; you take a drink of water, feel ice against your lips. That shiver; you would think, no—is she cold?

RACHEL TROUSDALE

Olean does eventually return to the mystery at hand and the core question of the Central Library fire: motive. Why would Peak have set it? Whenever Olean picks up the Harry Peak thread again, the effect of Los Angeles on the minds of its denizens is never far from her speculation over his guilt. “I could picture Harry Peak,” she tells us, “because I saw him every day in the handsome over-groomed busboys who waited on me, and in the gym-trim extras I sometimes came across when there was filming in my neighborhood—I could recognize their anxious posing, as if each moment bristled with the potential to change their entire lives.”

Could movie-star ambitions have led Peak to commit arson? Olean lets her mind hover over this question, but she never settles on an answer. As unlikely as it might seem, there are several precedents for this in Los Angeles. Olean recounts the story of a Glendale fire captain named John Leonard Orr, who sold a novel about an arsonist/firefighter to a literary agent. After suspicions were raised that a number of the fires in the book bore disquieting similarities to actual incidents in Glendale, Orr’s agent responded blithely, “We live in LA. Everyone’s got a script or book they’re trying to sell.” Yet it turned out that Orr was, in fact, behind the fires; he was eventually found guilty of more than “twenty counts of arson and four counts of murder.”

Peak, too, enjoyed the spotlight that crime brought with it. The day of the fire, he called a friend at his old valet job and bragged about being at the library that day, talked about how hot the place had gotten, and added that a sexy fireman carried him out of the building. “Harry loved to insert himself into any public spectacle,” the friend recalled, so he took the story with a grain of salt—just another one of Peak’s tall tales, like the one about being friends with Burt Reynolds.

But Peak kept retelling the story to his friends, embellishing it each time, until eventually he added that he had actually set the fire. His roommate’s mother and sister called the police, and Peak was picked up for questioning. He proved to be just as slippery with the truth when face-to-face with investigators. “The problem with Harry,” Olean writes, is “that he didn’t just pick one lie and stick with it. He presented so many versions of the story that believing one meant disbelieving another.”

Eventually, the police counted seven different versions of events offered by Peak, though he maintained his innocence in each.
But even those who thought he was guilty still could not determine why he had done it. Was it attention-seeking? Could it even have been racism? Peak made several mentions to the police of an African-American guard at the library who’d supposedly been rude to him—it was one of the few details that remained consistent across his various testimonies. Or was he angry that his recent application to join the fire department had been rejected?

One explanation that seems plausible to Orlean was the one he’d shared with his ex-boyfriend: that he’d been having sex with a stranger in the bathroom and accidentally dropped a lit cigarette in the trash can. Though “it even had the virtue of being logical,” Orlean writes, the fire never touched the library’s restrooms, so it couldn’t have been true.

In the end, in fact, no one, not even the police, could determine if Peak ever really was at the library that day, and if he had been, what he was doing there if not setting a fire. Was a postcoital cigarette to blame, or was it all just a lie, even his being there—a wholly invented story designed to inject something exciting into an otherwise humdrum existence of part-time jobs and auditions that never led to anything. Peak was released three days after his arrest and never charged. To this day, no one knows who set it.

If the *The Library Book* does not draw conclusions about Peak or the Central Library fire, what makes it compelling is that, while it is ostensibly a book about ambition, desperation, and loss, it is also about a city and a public institution teeming with life, humor, and wild personalities. Early in the investigation into the fire, a woman writes to the police accusing someone she knew of setting it. “Dear Sir,” read her letter, “This man, Richard W———, may have set FIRE to your library… He was born an Aries.” And so many of the stories offer testament to what happens when you spend a considerable amount of time focused on a public space that is free and open to everyone; no matter what one is in pursuit of, you will come up against the full gamut of humanity. In this way, Orlean consoles her readers, assuring us that, as long as there are people, there will be new stories in need of writing down and new stories to fill a place like Central Library. There is perhaps no place that understands that better than Los Angeles, a city where new people arrive every day, eager to tell a story to the world.
distribution systems from scratch: giant networks of new algorithms, miles of conveyor belts, fleets of custom trucks with PalmPilot-wielding delivery drivers. At its peak, Webvan had a billion-dollar contract with the construction firm Bechtel for new distribution facilities around the country. Relan named Instacart and Postmates as lean start-ups that were learning from Webvan’s failure.

It’s easy to see Relan’s retrospective advice as obvious and Webvan as a predictable case of techno-folly, but what the company was trying to do was marshal technological and communications advances to offer consumers a relatively modest uptick in living standards. In the 20 years since, Americans have more or less given up on the idea that progress should simply improve everyone’s life. We now accept that every step forward comes with costs to someone somewhere, whether it’s content moderators in the Philippines or taxi drivers in New York. In the future, companies would not be making the same mistakes as Webvan, and the current crop of tech-based firms has learned to stay light and charge for convenience. Most of these services are no longer aimed at a large, inclusive consumer base but a small, wealthy one.

Take Instacart. The grocery-delivery start-up has a nominal valuation near Webvan’s peak market cap; but, on paper, it’s much smaller. Instead of trying to build a shopping infrastructure for the 21st century, Instacart is a middleman platform that connects buyers with pseudo-independent personal shoppers. When the company started out, it didn’t have relationships with stores, so it just marked up orders, adding costs for consumers rather than trying to minimize them. The personal shoppers would go to the grocery store, buy the products at the register, and deliver them. What was ostensibly a grocery service was in fact a digital market where you could hire someone to run an errand, at a considerable cost. This is a far cry from the Webvan distribution system: It neither seeks to build the infrastructure for new forms of stable employment nor attempts to bring costs down for most consumers.

In a 2000 report to the Securities and Exchange Commission, Webvan bragged that all of its couriers “are Webvan employees…. The courier training lasts two weeks and includes 36 hours of classroom training, 12 hours of driving training and 28 hours of on the job training…. Webvan’s couriers receive a competitive compensation package, including cash and stock options.” Commentators pegged Webvan’s delivery-labor costs at $30 an hour, or $45 in today’s money. Instacart, on the other hand, is notorious for cutting its pay and hiding tip options on the app, as well as refusing to classify its workers as workers at all. One analyst figured that to earn its valuation, Instacart would have to get its delivery-labor costs to $10 an hour, and then keep pushing down.

Sarah Kessler’s new book, *Gigged: The End of the Job and the Future of Work*, is an account of the new generation of Internet businesses that have migrated from the Webvan model to the Instacart one. A deputy editor at *Quartz*, Kessler tells these companies’ stories not from the point of view of their executives, but from the vantage of the workers on the lowest rungs. If the Webvan era, at its best, was an attempt at a highly automated 20th-century capitalism, Instacart and its compatriots had their start in the years after the 2008 financial crisis, when no one was looking to pay semiskilled workers $30 an hour, let alone $45.

In *Gigged*, we get a national tour of the new labor relations that provide the basis for Silicon Valley’s prosperity. Kessler began covering the gig economy in 2011, when she was herself a casualty of her company’s created by this new economy so much as the conditions suffered by those employed in it. What almost all of these workers have in common is that, for whatever reason, their time is not worth as much as other people’s in the 21st-century labor market. That makes them potential candidates for gig work.

The new middleman-app companies never planned to build futuristic infrastructure the way Webvan did; while becoming profitable, they were not interested in helping to raise living standards for consumers and workers. What they were interested in, above all else, was increased efficiency. But instead of using technology to reduce the role of labor in production through automation and cybernetics, they perform what is essentially arbitrage with human life. If Person A’s time is worth $50 an hour on the market, and Person B’s time is only worth $10, Person A should have a strong incentive to hire Person B to perform life’s unpleasant tasks. This kind of shallow thinking is what current Silicon Valley fortunes are made of.

It’s an old joke that ride-share companies are slowly inventing the bus, but it’s more accurate to say that they have reinvented the servant. Few Americans have ever been prosperous enough to afford the full-time, one-on-one attention of servants, but most can afford at least some small amount of personal service on occasion, if only the rare cab ride. The goal was to bring these personal services to middle- and upper-middle-income consumers at the expense of those who are forced to do the work.

In a perfectly efficient world, people would be served by others to the exact degree that the market values their time more—and in the 21st century, the market doesn’t value most people’s time that highly. If middlemen-app companies lower the barriers to service in such a world and charge a small fee in the process, they should, in essence, have a license to print money. It has not escaped the critics of the gig economy that much of this work is also “women’s work” and that gender has long functioned, at least in part, as a technology that matches masters and servants.

One strength of Kessler’s book is that she is not interested in the efficiencies created by this new economy so much as the conditions suffered by those employed in it. What almost all of these workers have in common is that, for whatever reason, their time is not worth as much as other people’s in the 21st-century labor market. That makes them potential candidates for gig work.

But while some gig-economy start-ups claim that people seek out such work because they want the flexibility, the truth is that they seek it out because it’s all that’s left for them. “I haven’t really met many people in general who don’t value stability and safety,” Kessler writes. The “flexibility” is imposed, and workers do the best they can to adjust. The exception is the highly skilled coder who finds that he can do better for himself as an inde-
pendent contractor on a project-by-project basis online than as a full-time staff employee. He should enjoy it while he can, because with all the tech companies pushing coding into school curriculums, he’s going to have a lot more competition in the future, which means less money. Just ask the cabdrivers.

Though many of Kessler’s subjects are not the average gig-industry employee, they can be portals to particular insights. For example, Kristy is a worker on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk platform (named for the 18th-century chess-playing “machine” that merely hid a human operator) who leads a “Turker” forum and uses computer scripts to cobble together a living from the site’s nearly valueless micro-tasks. Her story helps the reader to see just where the efficiency of gig labor comes from: Workers develop their own ways to speed up the completion of their tasks, even with no guidance.

In Capital, Marx theorized that, to maintain profitability, employers would eventually have to “depress wages below the value of labor power”—that is to say, below what the worker needs to subsist. Marx doesn’t elaborate much on this, and his interpreters, to the degree that they’ve noticed this section, have suggested that market dynamics and regulations tend to keep this level of wage depression from happening. After all, if you don’t provide workers with enough to live on, eventually they die, and then they can’t work for you anymore. But that’s a flat and economistic way to think about the world. What Kristy the Turk shows us is that, by depressing wages so low (in some cases, a penny a task), employers put the onus on workers to do the innovating themselves. One of the tasks that Kristy performed was identifying images to train image-recognition software. Clicking a mouse when you see something yellow at 3 cents a pop is terrible work and cannot possibly offer a living wage, but by finding and installing a script that let her use her keyboard instead, Kristy could make $10.80 an hour. By pricing the task so low, however, the employing firm successfully transferred the cost of software development to the Turker.

More than any technology—or even technology at all—what the gig-economy companies share is the strategy of shifting costs to workers. Why should Uber train drivers when people already learn how to drive on their own? Why write a user interface for image identifiers when you can pay them so meagerly that they have to figure one out themselves? Why supply cleaners with supplies if they’re not re-

When Kessler attempts to seek out organizers to address these new labor relations, she’s frustrated. We can theorize all we want about the potential ways that gig workers can unionize, but the Uber driver she meets who wants to foment a strike doesn’t have a real base of fellow workers to appeal to, just a manic streak and a few grand to throw away on Facebook ads. He ends up trying to leverage a small payout from Uber to make him go away, but he’s unsuccessful here as well. From a worker’s point of view, there’s not a lot to be hopeful about in Gigged at all.

Even if we associate the gig economy with technology, cheap labor can’t speed scientific advancement, at least not the useful kind. It’s only when firms are forced to value their employees’ time that they’re compelled to innovate in ways that save labor and generate real social progress. Take a common right-wing meme about higher pay for fast-food workers: $15 per hour?? meet your replacement. The text is superimposed over a photo of a digital McDonald’s kiosk that says: ORDER HERE. What the meme means is that capitalists have the technological ability right now to automate all sorts of unpleasant drudge work, but they don’t feel the need to make that kind of investment as long as they’re allowed to pay humans so poorly.

In the transition between the first and second round of Internet companies, we can see a clear adjustment of priorities. Now they orient their products and services toward a shrinking wealthy elite and draw their profits from a growing precarious subclass of workers. At its peak, Webvan had 4,000 employees and targeted budget-conscious consumers; Instacart has less than a quarter of that number and targets wealthier consumers who want other people to bring them stuff now. Genuine investment—especially in employee training—is to be avoided. Gig workers, as Kessler reminds us, do not compose a large segment of the world’s labor force, but neither did industrial proletarians when Marx and Engels started paying special attention to them. This category of workers who do more and get less will continue to grow in importance for the 21st-century economy. At this point it’s clear that this is mostly bad for most people.
Puzzle No. 3491

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

ACROSS
1 19th-century novelist spewing hot air galore (7,5)
9 Shift imprecise red states’ boundaries (5)
10 Bill and I emptied our cheeks (9)
11 Draw tired spouse (9)
12 Lead in Titanic after Ocean’s 10 (4)
14 Unproductive, endless enjoyment with something you use to 3 (6)
15 Nation’s carbon-free stuff is brown (8)
17 10 in genuine counterargument (8)
19 Prepare for birth without an initial legacy (6)
22 Blue beam gets around the speed of light (4)
23 Lie in beds and smile mysteriously (9)
26 Oversee appeal involving skeezy individual lives (9)
27 Nocturnal goddess returns to encompass unknown void (5)
28 Bicycle parts for each boy’s official representative (12)

DOWN
1 Makes haste to obtain first of decorated skins (5)
2 Pair of rebels raised cane on Tuesday to participate in a historic diversion (7)
3 Create a mosaic of hawk in dilapidated 19 (10)
4 For example, Annie Oakley’s beginning new version of harp number (6)
5 Slave scrambled to fuel a Western city (3,5)
6 Second person, right as always (4)
7 Pilot pressing disemboweled cat (6)
8 Fiction of the past? (8)
13 Musical mistake: reusing many elements (4,2,4)
14 Stronghold favoring lock (8)
16 Bit of data kept in weirdly darkish storage device (4,4)
18 Muscle Beach’s leader: Scary Spice (6)
20 Cook no basil for people deficient in pigment (7)
21 Evaluate more than one: 10 seconds (6)
24 Woman comes through well enough (5)
25 Support piece of a plane (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3490
ACROSS 1 STAG NATION 8 S + INK
9 GENE + VA 11 hidden (canor)
12 C + ONE 13 STAIN 15 MIRACLE
*gen rec* 17 TRIAGE(D)Y 22 ICLAT + ER
(int) 23 initial letters 24 MIMICOS + A
25 CHA(S)ER (search) 26 “beer” (hier)
27 PER CUS + ION

DOWN 1 AS + COT 2 TIN + CT
3 ANT + E 4 GA + R.N. ET 5 N.E. + PAL
6 IND + 1 + A 7 hidden 10 GEN + L.E.
14 final letters 16 “seeds” 18 RE(C)AP
19 A + ROSE 20 BA(REN 21 hidden
22 alternate letters 23 HOBO[ken]

ANTAGONIST
SKINAVENGE
CONTRAPDES
ONCENSAINT
STRECLAIM
GYRATEDBOE
ALERTDHAUL
RPCOMAOISM
CHASERBRIE
PERSONIC

The Nation (ISSN 0027-8378) is published 34 times a year (four issues in March, April, and October; three issues in January, February, July, and November; and two issues in May, June, August, September, and December) by The Nation Company, LLC © 2019 in the USA by The Nation Company, LLC, 520 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10018; (212) 209-5400. Washington Bureau: Suite 108, 110 Maryland Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002; (202) 546-2239. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Subscription orders, changes of address, and all subscription inquiries: The Nation, PO Box 8505, Big Sandy, TX 75755; or call 1-800-333-8536. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to Bleuchip International, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2. Canada Post: Publications Mail Agreement No. 40612608. When ordering a subscription, please allow four to six weeks for receipt of first issue and for all subscription transactions. Basic annual subscription price: $69 for one year. Back issues, $6 prepaid ($8 foreign) from: The Nation, 520 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10018. If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. The Nation is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Member, Alliance for Audited Media. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Nation, PO Box 8505, Big Sandy, TX 75755. Printed in the USA.
US Civil Rights


Featuring André Robert Lee

Visit iconic sites of the civil-rights movement in Jackson, Little Rock, Memphis, Selma, Birmingham, and Montgomery; meet with people who were a part of history; and immerse yourself in the courage and perseverance that continue to inspire today’s fight for justice and equality.

THE HIGHLIGHTS

• **Meet** with senior staff at the Equal Justice Initiative’s headquarters in Montgomery, Alabama, to learn more about the organization’s work, and visit the newly opened Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice, the nation’s first memorial commemorating the victims of lynching in the US.

• **Travel** to Birmingham, Alabama, and visit the 16th Street Baptist Church, where a bomb killed four young African-American girls as they prepared to sing in their choir on September 15, 1963. Meet with the Rev. Dr. Carolyn McKinstry, who was inside the church when the bomb exploded.

• **Stand** at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, and tour the 54-mile Selma-to-Montgomery National Historic Trail, following the marchers’ route that helped change American history.

• **Visit** the recently opened Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in Jackson and meet with innovative leaders at Cooperation Jackson, a network of worker-owned cooperatives that empower black and Latino communities.

• **Tour** the Medgar Evers Home Museum in Jackson with curator Minnie White Watson, where Evers was murdered in 1963, his blood still staining the concrete driveway.

• **Explore** the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968.

The cost of the 7-night program starts at $4,180. See complete details at TheNation.com/CIVIL-RIGHTS

Your host for the trip will be André Robert Lee, a teacher, producer, and acclaimed documentary filmmaker who has led multiple civil-rights tours of the American South over the past several years. He directed and produced The Prep School Negro.

100% of the proceeds from our travel programs support The Nation’s journalism.

For more information, e-mail us at travels@thenation.com, call 212-209-5401, or visit TheNation.com/CIVIL-RIGHTS
TAKE A KNEE WITH THE NATION

Made in the USA
50% polyester, 50% combed ringspun cotton
T-shirt illustration by Eric Drooker

Order online at shop.thenation.com or call (844) 549-5528.