



**Concours
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Unpaid Work Experience Is a Requirement That Harms Students in Social Work, Nursing, and Teaching

At the nursing home where Alejandra Luis, 23, works, she spends time seeing clients, working on referrals and discharges, doing client assessments, and doing computer work like keeping notes on client charts. Her placement there and the work that comes with it is a requirement of her master's in social work program and that labor is unpaid. Attending classes and working at the nursing home didn't leave enough hours to squeeze in her day job at a bank, so she's living off student loans and credit cards and will graduate with roughly \$90,000 in student loan debt. She doesn't think she'll ever be able to pay it off.

Despite the knowledge that unpaid internships deepen inequities across fields and there is ongoing advocacy to end them, there are entire fields, including education, social work, and nursing, where unpaid labor is often built into the structure of the field from the outset. The requirement for coursework fails to take into account the economic realities for students. According to Payment for Placements (P4P), a movement across university campuses calling for social work students to be paid for fieldwork, 88% of internships for a master's in social work at the University of Michigan were unpaid. While P4P focuses on social work, students in a variety of professions are advocating for changes to the expectation of unpaid labor. These students say economic hardship shouldn't be a prerequisite for entering their fields of choice.

"If you are a parent, if you have a family, if you have to have a job, if you're poor, if you're disabled, it's so difficult to get into the field of social work," says Elise Colquitt, 24, co-chair of P4P at the University of Georgia. Some programs discourage students from having outside jobs since it adds to their level of stress, Colquitt tells *Teen Vogue*. She was given advice to pick up shifts at a restaurant, for example, but that option isn't feasible, because she's disabled. It's not a solution to the expectation of unpaid labor and it's a suggestion given with able-bodied students in mind. To Colquitt, unpaid labor defines the field even later on: "They can be offered the lowest salary," she says of people moving into social work positions after they get their degrees. "And they will be excited to take it because it's more than what they've been making."

Carlos Mark Vera, the cofounder of Pay Our Interns, which has supported P4P, notes the connection between unpaid labor and the student debt crisis. Some states require multiple degrees in order to enter fields like social work and teaching and then graduates receive salaries that barely allow them to make ends meet. Many of these fields are already shaped by systemic pay inequities related to race and gender and it's well-documented that unpaid internships exacerbate racial wealth gaps. "People are taking out student loans to do these practicums and fieldwork," continues Vera, "and oftentimes, that's actually where they accrue their student debt. Then you're graduating [and] you're making just a little bit above the poverty line." Sustained organizing against unpaid work requirements comes at a time of shortages in teaching, nursing, teaching, and health care, social work, counseling, and more in the midst of burnout, underpayment, and understaffing.

These work requirements could be considered a form of coercion, Erin Hatton, PhD, a professor of sociology at the University at Buffalo-SUNY, tells *Teen Vogue*. "This unpaid labor requirement is like the gatekeeping function," Dr. Hatton says. "They have to do this in order to embark on a career." The fact that these jobs are construed as "education" rather than "work" means students lack protections they would have as employees, including the right to be part of a union and not be subject to discrimination, harassment, or unsafe working conditions, Dr. Hatton explains. "Even when working to learn is also an investment in your future, that does not justify not being paid for your labor."

In social work, Payment for Placements has founded 40 chapters at schools across the country, each working within the parameters of their school and state to serve students. The Michigan chapter of P4P played a pivotal role in legislation passed to pay graduate students in public colleges and universities who are studying social work, psychology, and counseling, \$25 an hour for up to 20 hours a week of fieldwork. In other professions, similar efforts are underway.

Source: Teen Vogue

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As the first generation of solar panels begins wearing out, a recycling industry is taking shape

Plans to address climate change rely on massively scaling up clean, solar electricity. The great majority of worn and damaged panels are still dumped in landfills. But with more and more piling up, many people know that needs to change.

In this desert city where Arizona, California, Sonora and Baja California meet, North America's first utility-scale solar panel recycling plant has opened to address what founders of We Recycle Solar call a "tsunami" of solar waste. The panels, stacked and banded, come here from the company's main collection warehouse in Hackettstown, N.J., plus six other locations across the country. Workers maneuver the stacks into the sprawling 75,000-square-foot facility on forklifts, then gently lift each out by hand to begin separating by brand and model. Some have only a few cracks in their glass, sometimes from storm damage. These can be reused, said Adam Saghei, chief executive of We Recycle Solar, and there is a market for them — clients around the world who search for refurbished panels for their affordability. The Yuma facility, he says, is like "your local thrift store that looks to upcycle." Those that don't go toward testing and resale head down a conveyor belt where glass, metals and other materials with value are separated.

For Saghei, the inspiration for the company came in 2017. He was working in the computer electronic waste sector, seeing solar spread across warehouse roofs and wondering where it would go eventually. He realized green technology doesn't stay green once it is decommissioned or retired. "Solar energy is a great technology, but it can feed a whole industry like aluminum and glass. Why are we spending tens of millions of dollars on these materials from overseas when we can produce them right here, right now?" he thought.

Copper is one metal that the recycling yields, said Dwight Clark, director of compliance and recycling technology at We Recycle Solar, as others nearby sorted incoming panels. "Granted, it's not a lot of pounds per solar panel. But when we do 10,000 pounds of solar panels an hour, we end up with a hundred pounds of copper an hour coming out of it," he said. "The aluminum ... could come back as more solar panel frames or it could go into the flight deck of a new Boeing aircraft."

By 2050, solar waste will total some 78 million tons globally, said Mool Gupta, a professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at University of Virginia. The reason recycling and recovery isn't robust yet, Gupta said, is that companies struggle to justify the \$30-per-panel cost when it costs only \$1 to send it to a landfill. If we hope to one day see 100% of retired solar recycled, said Garvin Heath, a senior scientist at the Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory, "Let's not make it any more expensive than what it would cost to landfill the module ... let's not have it cost the consumer anything and instead have it break even for the recycler." Market researcher Visiongain estimates the global market at \$138 million for last year and growing fast, boosted in part by incentives offered in the Inflation Reduction Act in the U.S.

People need to stop scrapping the modules as fast as possible, said Jack Groppo, professor of mining engineering at the University of Kentucky. "Once the solar panels go into the landfill, they're gone unless we go back and mine the landfill," he said. The Yuma facility can process 7,500 panels in a single day or roughly 69 million pounds per year. As of early June, it estimates more than 650,000 tons of carbon dioxide have been avoided. It is reusing about 60% of the panels that come in.

For now, solar recycling companies are still figuring out how to make money. We Recycle Solar sends out employees to dismantle large solar arrays, and that is currently its biggest source of revenue. Reselling refurbished solar panels is No. 2, and recycling brings in the least. Decommissioning and resale are actually subsidizing some of the recycling costs, Saghei said. But Gupta said these profitability challenges are temporary and will be overcome. Researchers are hard at work on solving them, he said. "Too many lives are lost to pollution, and solar is one of the top solutions."

Source: Los Angeles Times

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Tech Firms Once Powered New York's Economy. Now They're Scaling Back.

For much of the last two decades, including during the pandemic, technology companies were a bright spot in New York's economy, adding thousands of high-paying jobs and expanding into millions of square feet of office space. Their growth buoyed tax revenue, set up New York as a credible rival to the San Francisco Bay Area — and provided jobs that helped the city absorb layoffs in other sectors during the pandemic and the 2008 financial crisis. Now, the technology industry is pulling back hard, clouding the city's economic future.

Facing many business challenges, large technology companies have laid off more than 386,000 workers worldwide since early 2022, according to *layoffs.fyi*, which tracks the tech industry. And they have pulled out of millions of square feet of office space because of those job cuts and the shift to working from home. That retrenchment has hurt lots of tech hubs, and San Francisco has been hit the hardest with an office vacancy rate of 25.6 percent, according to Newmark Research.

Consider Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram. It is now unloading a big chunk of the more than 2.2 million square feet of office space it gobbled up in Manhattan in recent years after laying off around 1,700 employees this year. The company has opted not to renew leases covering 250,000 square feet in Hudson Yards and for 200,000 square feet on Park Avenue South. Spotify is trying to sublet five of the 16 floors it leased six years ago in 4 World Trade Center, and Roku is offering a quarter of the 240,000 square feet it had taken in Times Square just last year. Twitter, Microsoft and other technology companies are also trying to sublease unwanted space.

The tech sector has been a driver of New York's economy since the late-90s dot-com boom helped to establish "Silicon Alley" south of Midtown. Then, after the financial crisis, the expansion of companies like Google supported the economy when banks, insurers and other financial firms were in retreat. Small and large tech companies added 43,430 jobs in New York in the five years through the end of 2021, a 33 percent gain, according to the state comptroller. The growth in jobs fueled demand for commercial space, and tech, advertising and media companies accounted for nearly a quarter of the new office leases signed in Manhattan in recent years, according to Newmark.

A few big tech companies are still expanding in New York. Google plans to open St. John's Terminal early next year. Including the terminal, Google will own or lease around seven million square feet of office space in New York. Amazon has added 200,000 square feet of office space in New York, Jersey City and Newark since 2019. The company will have added roughly 550,000 square feet of office space later this summer, when it opens 424 Fifth Avenue, the former Lord & Taylor department store, which it bought in 2020 for \$1.15 billion. And though many tech companies continue to let employees work from home for much of the week, they are also trying to woo workers back to the office, which could help reduce the need to sublet space.

Salesforce, a software company that has offices in a tower next to Bryant Park, said it was not considering subletting its New York space. "Currently I'm facing the opposite problem in the tower in New York," said Relina Bulchandani, head of real estate for Salesforce. "There has been a concerted effort to continue to grow the right roles in New York because we have a very high customer base in New York." New York is and will remain a vibrant home for technology companies, industry representatives said. "I have not heard of a single tech company leaving, and that matters," said Julie Samuels, the president of TECH:NYC, an industry association. "If anything, we are seeing less of a contraction in New York among tech leases than they are seeing in other large cities."

Fred Wilson, a partner at Union Square Ventures, said tech executives now felt less of a need to be in Silicon Valley, a shift that he said had benefited New York. "We have more company C.E.O.s and more company founders in New York today than we did before the pandemic," Mr. Wilson said, referring to the companies his firm has invested in.

Source: The New York Times

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\$30 Entrance Fees: Are America's Art Museums Only for the Wealthy?

Art lovers will bear the cost: The Guggenheim is the latest to increase its price of admission to \$30 — the new normal. Audience sizes just aren't what they used to be at the Guggenheim Museum, where membership — once a dependable source of income — has declined by nearly 16 percent since 2019, and attendance in June slumped by 26 percent, from 89,600 to 65,900, over the same time frame. What has increased is the cost of running the institution. A newly unionized work force has bumped up salary expenses, while inflation is driving up the cost of everything from heating to shipping artworks, according to senior museum officials. At the Guggenheim, leaders said that options for relief were limited after three years of managing the fiscal crisis of the pandemic. And so on Tuesday, the museum raised admission fees, bringing the cost of an adult ticket from \$25 to what is becoming the new normal for major museums: \$30.

Most cultural organizations are navigating the same uncertainties, asking if the decision to raise fees to offset operating costs — basically maximizing revenues from a smaller core of visitors and art lovers — is worth the risk of limiting access to great art to mostly wealthier patrons. Museums, which are concerned about alienating the families and the diverse crowds they have been trying to court, say it's typically a measure of last resort. "As we recover from the lingering financial strain caused by the pandemic, the museum needs to increase its admission prices, which have not been adjusted since 2015," said Sara Fox, a spokeswoman for the Guggenheim. "The new rates align with those of the museum community in New York City and will help support the operational costs of the museum."

The trend started last July, according to interviews with nearly two dozen cultural institutions, when the Metropolitan Museum of Art raised its adult admission price to \$30, a \$5 increase. Others have followed, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and, on Aug. 15, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which cited "decreased attendance figures, slow citywide recovery in the downtown core, inflation and other rising costs." The Art Institute of Chicago is one of the most expensive tickets, at \$32 for out-of-state visitors.

Museums, which often receive tax exemptions as nonprofits, are expected to keep their collections accessible to the general public. Some also receive subsidies. The Met received \$26 million in government funding for the 2023 fiscal year, on an annual budget of around \$300 million, while the Guggenheim received \$520,000 during the same period, on a budget of \$67.7 million. Pay-what-you-wish policies often come with limitations. The Met offers its pay-what you-wish program to residents of New York State and students in the tristate area. The Guggenheim charges students \$19 (children under 12 receive free admission) and the museum maintains a pay-what-you-wish policy for everyone on Saturdays that is expanding by one hour, from 5-8 p.m. The Whitney holds its pay-what-you-wish hours on Fridays from 7-10 p.m.

A recent survey by the nonprofit American Alliance of Museums illustrates the potential for economic risk: It found that only one-third of museums have rebounded to pre-pandemic attendance levels, with two-thirds experiencing reduced attendance closer to 70 percent. More than half predicted their profits to stay the same or decrease. "While the museum field is making strides in its recovery efforts, it will take years to fully rebound to prepandemic levels of staffing, revenue and attendance," said Brooke Leonard, the museum alliance's interim chief executive and chief of staff.

Some institutions do say their attendance has fully come back, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Detroit Institute of Arts. Eric Gewirtz, a spokesman for the Detroit Museum, said membership has increased by nearly 2,000 subscriptions. But overall, arts organizations have struggled.

Harry Philbrick, a museum veteran who is interim executive director of the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, which has free admission, is especially worried that changing attitudes among consumers might lead to an existential crisis for the industry. "Museums are really struggling" in part because the internet has taught younger generations that culture should be cheap, if not free, Philbrick said. "If you are used to getting music basically for free on your phone, why pay for art?" he said. "The museum format is antithetical to how some people are used to getting culture."

Source: The New York Times

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Let's not forget the real star of Barbie: shameless product placement

Did you know that Greta Gerwig's Barbie is a 114-minute advert for the toy company Mattel? Of course you did. You don't have to be Detective Barbie to figure that one out. Yet you may have missed that the film is not just an advert: it's an advert containing multiple other adverts. It's a Matryoshka of adverts, each one nestled within the next, all contained within a giant, plastic doll. Watching the film, I rolled my eyes at the starring role played by a spotless Chevrolet 4x4, and laughed aloud at the way the camera focused on Barbie's (empowering!) heart-shaped Chanel bag. Ryan Gosling, as Ken, wears three TAG Heuer watches at once at one point, and I instantly knew Mattel would sell the "I am Kenough" hoodie he sported at the end (although my cynicism didn't stretch to imagining its £58 price tag).

Product placement in film is by no means new but it seems to have picked up in pace – and shamelessness – in recent years. In 2015, the BBC asked whether it had gone too far in the James Bond franchise. But at least that was based on a series of books. Now, you can put adverts for watches, cars and handbags inside an advert for dolls. And it doesn't stop there. In early August, reviewers noted the "bizarre" and "brazen" presence of brands in Disney's comedy horror film Haunted Mansion, which – like Pirates of the Caribbean before it – is based on one of the company's rides. Haunted Mansion includes shout-outs to Amazon, Yankee Candle, CVS, Baskin-Robbins and Burger King – never mind that, like Barbie, the film was already an ad.

The trouble with all of this is that it appears to work. Auto Trader reported a 120% increase in interest for Chevy Corvettes after the Barbie trailer dropped, while TAG Heuer's CEO has claimed that customers are nicknaming one of its models the "Barbie watch". As of June 2022, product placement is now a \$23bn (£18bn) industry globally – a 14% growth in just two years. In an era of skippable ads, companies are clamouring to be featured inside movies and shows. Yet if brands don't boast about it, it can often be tricky to find out whether they did indeed pay (or provide free products in exchange) for promotion in a film.

I was convinced that the suspiciously sharp logo on Barbie's Birkenstocks proved that the company had paid for placement in the film, but Birkenstock told me it did not collaborate with Mattel, Warner Bros or any of Barbie's actors. According to Barbie costume designer Jacqueline Durran, Birkenstocks were in the script "from the beginning" thanks to the writer-director Greta Gerwig. The sandal company has benefited regardless, as Google searches for "women's Birkenstocks" have soared 518% in the UK since the film's release; the company is now considering going public with an alleged \$8bn (£6.3bn) valuation. Ironically, it can feel more authentic to include multiple brands in movies, because brands are everywhere in our real lives. And while spotting product placement once elicited a groan, audience resistance might be relenting. Earlier this year, the advertising company BENlabs published a survey into the UK market it had conducted that found 88% of respondents "experience positive emotions" after seeing brands in TV shows, with 60% saying they have searched for a product they've seen on TV.

Product placement regulation isn't the same everywhere. In the UK, it has only been allowed in British TV since 2010 and any episodes need to feature an Ofcom¹-mandated logo. But these distinctions matter less and less in a world of ubiquitous American streaming platforms. Barbie and Haunted Mansion are movies already banking on pre-existing IP (intellectual property), Hollywood's favourite letters. Nike, Tetris and Blackberry are just some of the companies whose origin stories or products have been dramatised in films this year. About 65% of people skip online video ads and TV viewing is now at its lowest since Ofcom records began, so ostensibly viewers are watching fewer adverts than ever. I fear that, in reality, all we're watching is ads.

Source: The Guardian

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¹ The Office of Communications (Ofcom) is the UK communications regulator, overseeing the broadcasting, telecommunications and postal industries.

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Why are Black rappers aligning themselves with the right?

In a two-part segment, Ice Cube and Carlson commiserated about cancel culture and cast doubt on the safety of the Covid vaccine. "It was six months, kind of a rush job and I didn't feel safe," Ice Cube said about his widely-publicized resistance to the Covid shot. He also claimed that he's been banned from appearing on the talkshows The View and Oprah because he is too much of an "independent thinker". It seems Ice Cube has become quite the conservative media darling lately, sitting down with not just Carlson, but Joe Rogan and Piers Morgan as well. He's joining a long list of rappers – Kanye West, Da Baby, Kodak Black, Lil Pump – who have all put themselves in dangerous proximity to conservative politicians even as rightwing populism threatens to destroy their communities. We can try to excuse this behavior or dress it up as "opening a dialogue" or "crossing the aisle" as much as we like, but that is not what this is about. So what do these rappers have in common with rightwingers who wouldn't otherwise touch them with a 10ft pole? Shared values.

In discussions about money, gender identity, public health and a variety of social issues, rappers and rightwingers have a lot more in common than you'd immediately think. Many people from both groups share hypermasculinity, conservative Christian values, and a distrust of social institutions (justified or not); and on this common ground sits a messy and dangerous alliance full of people who ordinarily would hate each other, but have come together to make vulnerable people their enemy. Ice Cube, for example, is a well-documented anti-vaxxer, and has expressed bigoted views on gender identity, as have many of his colleagues like Da Baby, Boosie and others.

When it comes down to the raw cents and dollars, modern-day wealth solidarity between mainly Black rappers and powerful conservatives isn't entirely surprising. Ownership in hip-hop is whiter than ever and the nature of the music itself has become increasingly capitalistic. Rap is no longer the embodiment of African American resistance it once was. Now, it's a hyper-commercialized cultural assembly line that's somehow been re-designed to glorify the very issues it once pushed so hard against. That's why society's current obsession with Black billionaires and one-percenters as "success stories" constantly falls so flat. The notion of building individual wealth as a means of collective liberation is as sinister as it is stupid. We know that Black wealth hoarding can't save us and that recreating the violent architecture of capitalism – but with Black people in the positions of power, of course – does nothing for the plight of everyday African Americans. Still, hip-hop legends like Jay-Z continue to peddle this demented lie because that is the very function of capitalism: keep the poorest in society busy providing cheap labor while they chase an impossible dream.

As many rappers gain inordinate wealth and power, they're increasingly exposed to the ways that all of that can also be a gateway to political influence and social dominance. These men don't want a better America for Black people, they want one where their worldviews are advanced, regardless of which enemies they have to sleep with in order to make that happen. And while Black voters obviously don't owe loyalty to any one political party, some rappers do function as community leaders in many ways, and they always have: that's why their allegiance to the right needs to be called out now. The custodians of rap as an art form have a duty to be responsible with their platforms. And when I say responsible, I'm not talking about respectability politics and pearl-clutching about raunchy lyrics. I'm talking about the stuff that materially affects Black people's lived experience, like what kind of politics to adopt, and why.

What's perhaps most fascinating about all this is the fact that many rappers are willing to align themselves with white supremacists not in spite of their marginalization, but because of it. But romancing fearmongering xenophobes isn't keeping us at the top, it's digging a pitiful hole to the bottom, a new low from which Black people as a community will not recover if we don't put a stop to it now.

Source: The Guardian

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‘Our history is rotting away’: the newspaper archivists preserving Nigeria’s past

In a quiet office in Lekki, an affluent suburb of Lagos, Nigeria, Boyega Adediran gingerly opens a 1997 copy of *PM News* and places a double-page spread on a large flatbed scanner. The newspaper was founded in 1994 but stopped printing physical copies in 2015. Scans of the fragile pages are quality checked by Grace Abraham and saved to a server that currently holds more than 50,000 pages of what will become Nigeria’s first interactive digital newspaper archive. A nonprofit startup called Archivi.ng is attempting to digitise every edition of every newspaper – 50 in all – published in Nigeria since 1 January 1960, the year of independence from Britain. The archive will launch its first tranche of documents in September. Dozens of volunteers have already spent months scouring libraries and meeting with publishers to get copies of old papers.

“Nigerian history is inaccessible online, and the greatest repository of that history is old newspapers,” says Fu’ad Lawal, the founder of Archivi.ng. “The newspapers from our history are rotting away in libraries and private archives, and our mission is to stop the erasure and recapture all the history before we lose them forever.” Allegra Ayida, a Nigerian doctoral researcher in history at Yale University who hopes to use the archive when it launches, says: “This exciting project fills an important gap in both accessibility and centralisation of a large volume of information.”

“The potential of having a newspaper archive since independence would allow the tracing of Nigerian history across 60 years in a country that has had 15 different leaders, five military coups, a bitter civil war, an annulled election, an interim administration and a brutal dictatorship,” she says. Since independence, history has been removed then reintroduced to the school curriculum, depending on who was in power in Nigeria’s revolving door of military dictatorships before democracy was restored in 1999.

In 2009, under President Yar’Adua, history was removed from the curriculum, ostensibly because there were not enough teachers. Last year, the then president, Muhammadu Buhari, made the subject compulsory again. Lawal has been surprised by the level of detail printed about the military coups and how much resistance there was among editors. Newspaper offices would often be raided or shut down by the government, and journalists faced intimidation, arrest and even death. One celebrated journalist, Dele Giwa, was killed by a parcel bomb in 1986 during Ibrahim Babangida’s presidency.

“The biggest discovery is not a single story. It is a series of events, the zeitgeist,” Lawal says. “We know so little about the amount of resistance that the military government met. So when Nigerians say, ‘We need someone with strong hands’, I say we don’t. The best thing that has happened to us is democracy. There is so much we don’t know about the fine details of those times, and how they shaped our present.” Lawal believes a lack of publicly accessible historical data contributed to Buhari’s return to power in 2015. He previously ruled between 1983 and 1985 following a military coup.

“Without documentation, we have false nostalgia because if you look at Buhari’s eight years [in his second term], it’s like entering a deep cryogenic sleep in 1985 and waking up in 2015. He just continued where he stopped in terms of policies and governance,” says Lawal. Archivi.ng raised \$15,000 in public donations for the archive, but needs \$100,000 to complete the project. The biggest challenge, however, is navigating Nigeria’s intellectual property law, which classifies newspapers as “literary works”, meaning reproduction of any kind needs the publishers’ permission. According to Lawal, some have been reluctant to help. “We are doing the infrastructural work, we are digging the well [of information] for people to come and fetch,” he says.

Source: The Guardian

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Richest 1% account for more carbon emissions than poorest 66%, report says

The richest 1% of humanity is responsible for more carbon emissions than the poorest 66%, with dire consequences for vulnerable communities and global efforts to tackle the climate emergency, a report says. The most comprehensive study of global climate inequality ever undertaken shows that this elite group, made up of 77 million people including billionaires, millionaires and those paid more than US\$140,000 (£112,500) a year, accounted for 16% of all CO₂ emissions in 2019 – enough to cause more than a million excess deaths due to heat, according to the report. For the past six months, the Guardian has worked with Oxfam, the Stockholm Environment Institute and other experts on an exclusive basis to produce a special investigation, The Great Carbon Divide. It explores the causes and consequences of carbon inequality and the disproportionate impact of super-rich individuals, who have been termed “the polluter elite”. Climate justice will be high on the agenda of this month’s UN Cop28 climate summit in the United Arab Emirates.

The Oxfam report shows that while the wealthiest 1% tend to live climate-insulated, air-conditioned lives, their emissions – 5.9bn tonnes of CO₂ in 2019 – are responsible for immense suffering. Using a “mortality cost” formula – used by the US Environmental Protection Agency, among others – of 226 excess deaths worldwide for every million tonnes of carbon, the report calculates that the emissions from the 1% alone would be enough to cause the heat-related deaths of 1.3 million people over the coming decades. Over the period from 1990 to 2019, the accumulated emissions of the 1% were equivalent to wiping out last year’s harvests of EU corn, US wheat, Bangladeshi rice and Chinese soya beans.

The suffering falls disproportionately upon people living in poverty, marginalised ethnic communities, migrants and women and girls, who live and work outside or in homes vulnerable to extreme weather, according to the research. These groups are less likely to have savings, insurance or social protection, which leaves them more economically, as well as physically, at risk from floods, drought, heatwaves and forest fires. The UN says developing countries account for 91% of deaths related to extreme weather. The report finds that it would take about 1,500 years for someone in the bottom 99% to produce as much carbon as the richest billionaires do in a year. The wealth gap between nations only partly explains the disparity. The report shows that in 2019 – the most recent year for which there is comprehensive data – high-income countries (mostly in the global north) were responsible for 40% of global consumption-based CO₂ emissions, while the contribution from low-income countries (mostly in the global south) was a negligible 0.4%. Africa, which is home to about one in six of the world population, was responsible for just 4% of emissions.

A less discussed but faster-growing problem is inequality within countries. Billionaires are still overwhelmingly white, male and based in the US and Europe, but members of this influential class of super-rich can increasingly be found in other parts of the world. Millionaires are even more dispersed. The report says this is bad news for the climate on multiple levels. The extravagant carbon footprint of the 0.1% – from superyachts, private jets and mansions to space flights and doomsday bunkers – is 77 times higher than the upper level needed for global warming to peak at 1.5C.

The corporate shares of many super-rich are highly polluting. This elite also wield enormous and growing political power by owning media organisations and social networks, hiring advertising and PR agencies and lobbyists, and mixing socially with senior politicians, who are also often members of the richest 1%, according to the report. Oxfam is calling for hefty wealth taxes on the super-rich and windfall taxes on fossil fuel companies to support the worst affected, reduce inequality and fund a transition to renewable energy. It says a 60% tax on the incomes of the wealthiest 1% would raise \$6.4tn a year and could cut emissions by 695m tonnes, which is more than the 2019 footprint of the UK. Oxfam International’s interim executive director, Amitabh Behar, said: “Not taxing wealth allows the richest to rob from us, ruin our planet and renege on democracy. Taxing extreme wealth transforms our chances to tackle both inequality and the climate crisis. These are trillions of dollars at stake to invest in dynamic 21st-century green governments, but also to re-inject into our democracies.”

Source: The Guardian

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Revealed: King Charles secretly profiting from the assets of dead citizens

The King is profiting from the deaths of thousands of people in the north-west of England whose assets are secretly being used to upgrade a commercial property empire managed by his hereditary estate. The Duchy of Lancaster, a controversial land and property estate that generates huge profits for King Charles III, has collected tens of millions of pounds in recent years under an antiquated system that dates back to feudal times. Financial assets known as bona vacantia, owned by people who died without a will or known next of kin, are collected by the duchy. Over the last 10 years, it has collected more than £60m in the funds. It has long claimed that, after deducting costs, bona vacantia revenues are donated to charities.

However, only a small percentage of these revenues is being given to charity. Internal duchy documents seen by The Guardian reveal how funds are secretly being used to finance the renovation of properties that are owned by the king and rented out for profit. The duchy essentially inherits bona vacantia funds from people whose last known address was in a territory that in the Middle Ages was known as Lancashire county palatine and ruled by a duke. Today, the area comprises Lancashire and parts of Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Cheshire and Cumbria.

A leaked internal duchy policy from 2020 gave officials at the king's estate license to use bona vacantia funds on a broad array of its profit-generating portfolio. Codenamed "SA9", the policy acknowledges spending the money in this way could result in an "incidental" benefit to the privy purse, the king's personal income. Properties identified in other leaked documents as eligible for use of the funds include townhouses, holiday lets, rural cottages, agricultural buildings, a former petrol station and barns, including one used to facilitate pheasant and partridge shoots in Yorkshire. The diversion of bona vacantia funds in this way has proven a financial boon to the king's estate. The practice is helping make rental properties more profitable, which indirectly benefits the King, who receives tens of millions in duchy profits each year – income that Buckingham Palace says is "private". Earlier this year, in his first annual payout since inheriting the estate from his mother, Charles received £26m from the Duchy of Lancaster.

In most of England and Wales, the assets of people who die without making a will and have no identifiable relatives are transferred to the Treasury, which then spends them on public services. The system is known by the Latin name bona vacantia, meaning "vacant goods", or assets that have no owner. However, under a custom that has its roots in the medieval period, two hereditary estates, or duchies, belonging to the royal family can collect bona vacantia from people who die in two regions in England. They also collect leftover assets owned by companies at the point they are dissolved. One is the Duchy of Cornwall, which generates profits for whoever is the heir to the throne.

Charles used to closely manage the duchy, but last year it passed to his son, Prince William. It collects bona vacantia funds from deceased Cornish residents. Duchy-owned properties qualify for the funds if they fit within a further seven categories, including buildings located in a conservation area, a site of special scientific interest or area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB), which cover large swaths of rural England. Duchy properties are also eligible for the funding if they are deemed by officials to be of "local historical importance". A Guardian analysis suggests the 2020 policy gave the duchy license to spend bona vacantia on roughly half of its property portfolio.

Royal sign manuals are understood to be references to the personal signature of the monarch – in this case Queen Elizabeth II. The Duchy of Lancaster spokesperson indicated that on accession to the throne, the King rubber-stamped his late mother's approval. "The King reaffirmed that money from bona vacantia should not benefit the privy purse, but should be used primarily to support local communities, protect the sustainability and biodiversity of the land and preserve public and historic properties across the Duchy of Lancaster estates," the spokesperson said. "This includes the restoration and repair of qualifying buildings in order to protect and preserve them for future generations."

Source: The Guardian

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ESCP BS - ORAL CONCOURS 2024 - ANGLAIS - LVA

Why US travellers are snubbing budget airlines

As prices rise across the globe, many Americans are looking to save money where they can, including travel. Yet the most recent slate of earnings reports from major US airlines indicates consumers aren't necessarily opting for budget airlines amid an inflation economy. During Q3 2023, low-cost airlines saw sluggish sales – while their legacy counterparts watched revenues spike. Frontier Airlines, one of the larger low-cost carriers, lost \$32m (£26m) during Q3. Spirit Airlines, likewise, lost \$157.6m (£197m). Southwest Airlines, which is considered a hybrid low-cost-full-service carrier in the industry, tallied a net income of \$240m (£193m), which was a drop of roughly 30% from last year.

It's not that people aren't investing in travel – quite the opposite. In May 2023, spending on flying and related travel expenses was up, as pandemic-related restrictions on international travel continue to ease, and international destinations that have been off-limits for years become especially appealing. The big three legacy airlines – Delta, United and American – have reaped the benefits of this wanderlust. Each posted huge profits in Q3. American's net income was \$263m (£212m); both United and Delta saw net income grow to \$1.1bn (£890m). In Delta's case, that was an increase of nearly 30% year-over-year. Many budget airlines depend on lower fares to siphon price-conscious flyers from full-service carriers. But these major airlines have also been lowering fares recently to compete with low-cost carriers, who usually have a pricing advantage. The September Consumer Price Index report from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shows the average airline fare across carriers has fallen 13% year-over-year.

Generally, say experts, the people travelling during an inflation economy prefer to fly major, full-service carriers. That's in part because they're largely higher earners who aren't feeling the financial squeeze as much, and are willing to pay for the amenities budget carriers charge for, like checked baggage and seat selection. "Low-cost and legacy airlines are very different types of airlines, and the budget airlines appeal to a very different type of customer," says Henry Harteveltdt, a travel industry and airline analyst. "No surprise, the typical customer for a budget airline earns far less than the person who's flying Delta."

There are a few key factors to consider when trying to forecast what happens next for low-cost carriers, says William McGee, a senior fellow for aviation and travel at the American Economic Liberties Project. First, he says, it's important to remember low-cost carriers fill "a necessary gap" in the market: if those carriers didn't exist, there likely wouldn't be any other airlines to service low-income flyers. If travellers were faced with the choice between paying more to fly on a full-service airline or simply not traveling at all, McGee says he thinks most people, rather than breaking the bank, would choose to stay home. The other, broader element at play is that the airline industry is in a precarious position, as there "is less competition and fewer airlines in the US than we've had at any time since before World War One".

There are currently 12 passenger scheduled airlines operating in the US, he says, which is up from 10 a few years ago (low-cost carriers Breeze and Avelo are the new entrants). Before that, Virgin America was the last airline to launch in 2007. At the industry's peak in the mid-1980s, there were 80 airlines – but a series of bankruptcies, mergers and acquisitions have left consumers with slim pickings. Now, four airlines – Delta, United, American and Southwest – control roughly 80% of the market. Currently, JetBlue is trying to acquire low-cost carrier Spirit, which could further reduce competition. McGee says this is important because even if there are only a relative handful of low-cost carriers, they serve as a buoy to keep airfares from increasing. "The mere presence of a low-cost carrier benefits everybody," McGee says, "as it forces the majors to lower their fares." If those airlines do go away – as Spirit might if it does merge with JetBlue – "people will be paying more in every city and every route."

Source: BBC

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Cities are advertising themselves as ‘climate havens.’ Experts say there’s no such thing

As the consequences of the planet warming grow ever more apparent, some cities are marketing themselves as “climate havens,” or refuges from extreme climate conditions. But experts agree that no city, state or region of the country is truly immune from the climate crisis. “It’s an absurd concept with a grain of truth,” said Neil Donahue, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University. Some places in the United States will be less harshly impacted than others by many types of extreme weather events that are being made worse by climate change, according to environmental experts. More inland parts of the country, for instance, won’t be as intensely affected by worsening hurricanes and sea level rise, experts said. And northern areas with more moderate climates won’t be as susceptible to extreme heat and forest fires. Many of the cities that are labeling themselves – or being labeled – climate havens are in those areas.

In 2019, Buffalo, N.Y., Mayor Byron Brown called the city a “climate refuge” during his State of the City address. The city of Cincinnati, Ohio, labeled itself as a future climate refuge in its 2023 Green Cincinnati Plan. “Although Cincinnati has its own climate vulnerabilities, it will likely emerge as a climate haven,” the plan reads. While those cities are expected to be relatively secure from certain extreme weather events, however, many of them are vulnerable to others. For example, Buffalo, which has a reputation for being one of the snowiest cities in the U.S., could experience more intense blizzards because of climate change. Dr. Susan Clark, an assistant professor of environment and sustainability at The State University of New York, Buffalo, said she doesn’t like the term “climate haven” for this reason. “It paints this picture that that we’re not experiencing that much change or impacts from climate change when we are,” she said. In Vermont, which has also been considered a potential refuge, flooding has become a bigger issue recently.

And nobody can escape the heat. While not every city is experiencing it at the same extreme level, everywhere is getting hotter as a result of climate change. Even Minnesota, home to a few so-called climate havens, is getting warmer and wetter. Earlier this month, over a third of Americans were under a heat advisory as a mix of high pressure and warm air created a heat dome over the center of the country.

Since no location comes without climate risk, experts urge caution when it comes to seeking out so-called havens. “You’re escaping one type of vulnerability but maybe opening yourself up to another,” said Clark. But experts also stress that there are ways to adapt communities to better weather the changing climate. “The fundamental challenge we face is not that the climate is going to be ruined, but that we built civilization for a different climate than the one we have now and the one we are going to have in the future,” said Dr. Lisa Allyn Dale, a lecturer at the Columbia Climate School. Building more resilient infrastructure, investing in disaster risk reduction and reforming agricultural practices are just a few things that can be done to help work with climate change, she said.

Source: The Hill

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IBM tells managers to come to the office or leave their jobs

IBM has given managers an ultimatum: come into the office or leave. The technology firm is pushing for an end to remote work, telling US-based managers to immediately report in-person or exit their role, according to an internal January 16th memo from Senior Vice President John Granger. Executives and managers will now be expected to be in-person at least three days a week, and remote workers living more than 50 miles from an office have until August to relocate closer.

The return-to-work push is complicated by the company's efforts in recent years to shed real estate. A number of IBM offices have shuttered since the pandemic, putting some remote workers in a position where they may be forced to move large distances in order to keep their employment. Closed offices include Philadelphia, central New York State and Iowa.

The consulting firm says workers that do not comply have to "separate from IBM" and that badge-in data will be used to track office attendance and confirm compliance with the new policy. IBM's shift away from remote work has been steadily increasing since the pandemic. Individual teams have already enacted in-person policies, and Chief Executive Officer Arvind Krishna has been vocal about his preference for office attendance. In an interview in May to Bloomberg, Krishna said promotions would be less likely for off-site workers. Krishna also said that the company plans to use AI to replace 7,800 jobs over the next five years. The company is simultaneously expecting to make job reductions. IBM slashed 3,900 jobs in January 2023, but Kavanaugh said the company is hiring.

IBM is not alone in pushing its employees back to the office, though many CEOs are giving up on the battle to get employees to return to the office full-time, according to a CEO survey from The Conference Board. Just 4% of US CEOs and 4% of CEOs worldwide say they will prioritize bringing workers back to the office full time, the survey found. Instead, attracting and retaining talent is the top internal priority for business leaders. The Conference Board surveyed more than 1,200 executives, including 630 CEOs, across the United States, Latin America, Japan and Europe. But that doesn't mean some US companies aren't taking a hardline stance in the new year. UPS recently announced it is ditching its hybrid work policy, and it's now calling corporate employees back full time.

Toward the latter half of 2023, major companies announced they were getting stricter on office work — but notably didn't announce a full return. In August, Amazon CEO Andy Jassy said employees who don't adhere to the 3-days-a-week in office rule could see their days at the tech giant numbered. Meta last year told employees that after Labor Day managers would track attendance for its own 3-day-a-week policy. Even Zoom, which powered the work from home (WFH) era, has called its employees back into the office.

But if a full-time return to office is dying, its antithesis may be as well. An EY US survey of C-suite corporate leaders found that full-time remote work plummeted from 34% in 2022 to just 1% in 2023. Scott noted senior members of companies are in the office more often. The study also noted that hybrid work is "firmly established."

Source: CNN

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Black Guns Matter founder says only 'acceptable' gun control is more 'safe, responsible' owners saving lives

Just days before an armed citizen stopped a gunman during a deadly mall shooting, Black Guns Matter and Solutionary Center founder Maj Toure argued the only "acceptable" gun control policy that could prevent future tragedies is safely and responsibly training more firearms owners. "Is somebody there with a good understanding of sight alignment, sight picture, grip, trigger press, and without disturbing the sight picture as they shoot the bad guy?" Toure told Fox News Digital last Thursday from FreedomFest in Las Vegas, Nevada. "I want to train and make sure that all American citizens have a working understanding of safe and responsible firearms ownership," Toure continued, "that if a weirdo comes into Uvalde, to Buffalo or wherever, and attempts to take life, there's a bunch of free Americans there to stop that threat – simple and plain."

Toure's comments come as Indiana authorities publicly praised 22-year-old Elisjsa Dicken for neutralizing a man who opened fire in a Greenwood mall that killed three and wounded two others in 15 seconds. Dicken's actions were hailed as "heroic" and "very tactically sound" in a police statement, despite him having no police or military background. "The actual answer of more gun control, meaning more safe and responsible firearms owners being there to defend life, is the only type of gun control that's acceptable to us at Black Guns Matter," Toure said.

Slamming lawmakers' efforts to amend or even repeal the Second Amendment in light of the recent mass shootings in Highland Park, Uvalde and Buffalo, Toure challenged that human rights and values "don't matter as much" if there are no means to defend them. "The gun control debate was done when the Second Amendment was written. It's not a debate anymore. It never was a debate," the gun rights activist and educator said. "There's people that will pretend as if they're an authority. The framework of this place is clear: Government is not the authority. So when they're asking for more gun control or asking us to support it, I say that the government and the state is morally bankrupt." He also shut down the notion and terminology of "gun violence." "There is no such thing as gun violence. It's just violence," Toure said. "And overwhelmingly, when the bad guy is met by good guys and gals with firearms, they put that bad guy down."

Answering what direction the gun control debate is heading, Toure noted there will likely never be a time in U.S. history when Americans won't own firearms. "In the woven framework of this place, there's a concentrated effort to make sure that the right of the people to keep and bear arms is respected," Toure told Fox News. "Anyone that doesn't understand that basic concept should actually crack open the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and have a better understanding of the reason why this is important for safe and responsible gun ownership."

Through donations and volunteer hours, Toure's organization is working to empower Americans with free firearms and conflict resolution training across the country. "Freedom isn't free nor is it easy," Toure said. "That's the thought process that goes into rebuilding and maintaining our republic."

Source: The Conversation

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Hollywood Has a Climate Problem

This past December, as my mailbox overflowed with screener DVDs of prestige films and television shows designed to capture my vote for the Writers Guild of America Awards, I did what any respectable resident of cozy season would do: I pressed play on Partner Track, a playful romantic comedy series that the Netflix algorithm had been trying to convince me to watch for months.

The trailer promised beautiful clothes, pretty people, and humor as Ingrid Yun, played by Arden Cho, brings viewers into the world of a Korean American woman trying to make junior partner at a top-flight (and nearly all white) law firm while balancing the flirtations of an earnest philanthropic millionaire and a cheeky senior associate—who is also a rival. The show delivered on the trailer's promise. But it also delivered something else—a stealth climate change plotline.

In her attempt to make partner, Yun works hard to close a deal wherein a large oil company, the ironically named Sun Corp, seeks to buy a smaller, family-run firm called Min Enterprises. But in a twist that's absent from the book on which the series is based, Sun Corp ultimately has one goal in mind: gutting Min's clean energy division. That surprised me. Years of working as an environmental reporter have given me what I jokingly call climate goggles. When I go outside, I see traces of climate change everywhere, like delicate tracks through a forest. But it's still very rare to see climate plotlines on my television.

"We always said that the goal of this show is to be a fun, frothy rom-com," says Georgia Lee, Partner Track's showrunner. "But if we're able to sneak in some commentary about stuff like structural racism and sexism, then we would be happy to do that. And if we can give a message about clean energy and the environment, so much the better."

There are limits to this analytical approach, which looks for specific words and can miss thematic content that doesn't include them. For example, Don't Look Up, a movie released outside of the study period, would likely fail their metric. Still, keyword analysis is useful for identifying trends.

Television (and streaming) are important because, well, we watch a lot — about three hours a day on average, according to the American Time Use Survey. The less we see climate change themes on screen, the less inclined we are to take climate action. As Nina Metz, a television and film critic for the Chicago Tribune, recently pointed out, "The media we consume isn't just entertainment. It seeps into our subconscious. And it shapes the way we think about the world, and the way we think about what's possible."

By that metric, what many of us think is possible is...nothing. While we dread the impacts of global warming, we often cope by ignoring the issue. According to a 2022 report from Yale's Program on Climate Change Communication, two-thirds of Americans rarely or never discuss climate change with family and friends, and less than a quarter say they hear people they know talking about climate change at least once a month. We can't fix a problem we don't talk about.

Source: Mother Jones

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Could your clothing help fight the climate crisis? Walmart is testing that idea

Walmart Inc. is teaming up with a California startup to test technology that removes carbon dioxide from its supply chain, with plans to eventually turn that CO₂ into yarn for clothing. As part of a pilot project with Rubi Laboratories Inc of San Leandro, Walmart will identify factories in its supply chain where carbon dioxide in waste gases can be captured using Rubi's reactor systems. Climate experts say the emerging technology of capturing CO₂ from industrial smokestacks can divert billions of tons of greenhouse gas from the Earth's atmosphere and store it deep underground or reuse it in ways yet to be discovered.

Instead of injecting carbon dioxide underground, Rubi's system uses biochemical processes to convert the gas to cellulose, the main substance in the walls of plant cells. It's a technique inspired by the way trees use carbon dioxide to grow. That cellulose is used to produce lyocell yarn, which can be made into textiles. After performance testing, Walmart and Rubi plan to develop a prototype apparel collection, according to a joint statement released Thursday. The pilot project runs through the end of 2024. The goal is to "find a greener way to manufacture apparel," Andrea Albright, Walmart's executive vice president of sourcing, said in an interview. "If we can pull CO₂ out of the atmosphere and put it into a raw material in a way that doesn't cause an abundance of electricity usage or other implications, that's compelling to us." That's still a big if.

Rubi Chief Executive Neeka Mashouf, who founded the company with her twin sister Leila in 2021, said its equipment should be able to capture 90% of a factory's carbon emissions. Although Rubi has successfully created yarn out of carbon emissions, it has yet to do so at scale. The startup has raised \$13.5 million from investors that include Talis Capital, Patagonia Inc.'s Tin Shed Ventures and Sweden's H&M Group, and has partnerships with brands such as Nuuly by Urban Outfitters Inc.

Direct air capture alone could be a nearly \$1-trillion business in the next decade, according to BloombergNEF, but cost and scalability remain open questions. The nascent technology has also drawn fire from environmentalists who say it can be misconstrued as a license to continue burning fossil fuels.

Walmart is among many large companies looking to cut emissions to reach climate goals. In 2020, the Bentonville, Ark., retailer said it planned to achieve net zero emissions across its operations — known as Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions — by 2040. That target would zero out just 5% of Walmart's total emissions, though. To address Scope 3, emissions generated by suppliers and customers, Walmart launched Project Gigaton in 2017. Today that initiative has about 5,200 suppliers engaged in the goal of reducing or avoiding 1 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030. But for now, the company's supply chains still rely heavily on manufacturing processes that generate carbon.

Price could prove to be another challenge: Walmart shoppers are used to affordable clothing. Albright said she's confident the retailer will be able to turn a profit on apparel from its Rubi collaboration. "Affordability is really key," Mashouf said. "We developed the technology to focus on making that possible from a unit-economics perspective."

Source: Los Angeles Times

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Poor people in the developing world have a right to medicine

Here is a simple moral proposition. No one in America, or anywhere in the world, should die or suffer unnecessarily because they cannot afford a prescription drug which, in many cases, costs a few cents or a few dollars to manufacture. As chairman of the US Senate health, education, labor and pensions committee (Help) I'm going to do everything I can to develop a new approach to the development and manufacturing of prescription drugs that responds to medical need, rather than short-term shareholder profit.

The tragic reality is that, today, millions of people around the world are suffering, and dying, from preventable diseases because they can't afford the outrageous prices charged by pharmaceutical companies. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one-third of humanity lacks access to essential medicines.

First, too often drug companies abuse patent monopolies to charge outrageous prices or otherwise keep lifesaving drugs out of reach for people around the world. For example, the Boston-based drug company Vertex is neither selling a transformative new treatment for cystic fibrosis in the developing world, nor allowing other local companies to produce it. Put simply, the company is not only refusing to bring a life-raft to people drowning with cystic fibrosis in poor countries, it is also blocking others from deploying their own life-rafts to people who need them to stay alive.

Second, far too often, the medicines that are desperately needed by millions of people in poor countries are not being produced by the pharmaceutical industry because the drug companies cannot make sufficient profits by doing so. In the US and other developed countries people often pay exorbitant prices for life-saving medicines. Poor people in developing countries can't. They don't have the money. The result: they die. Because the business model of the pharmaceutical industry values dollars gained over lives saved, there are not enough companies looking for transformative treatments, especially for diseases that afflict poor people.

Consider the case of tuberculosis (TB) – a disease that killed more than 1.3 million people in 2022, and is on the rise as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The TB vaccine still used today is more than a hundred years old, and only protects young children, even though adolescents and adults account for the majority of TB transmission. The testing of a promising new publicly funded TB vaccine that could potentially save millions of lives was delayed after its corporate owner, GSK, decided to focus on more profitable vaccines.

Fundamentally, we need to transform how we pay for the development of new prescription drugs. This starts with funding open-source research, so lifesaving information is shared, and scientists around the world can work together to research and manufacture their own breakthroughs. Patents should not stand in the way of public health. If we can provide \$886bn to the Pentagon for military spending, we can provide scientists with the money they need to develop cutting-edge cures that are accessible to everyone. People should not die because of their income or where they were born. We know what it will take to save lives. Now we must have the courage to stand up to the pharmaceutical industry. Let's do it.

Source: The Guardian

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Be warned: Deliveroo's victory over its riders shows just how vulnerable British workers are

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Deliveroo riders are self-employed and do not have a right to collective bargaining. After seven years of legal battles, a case brought by the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB) that began in Camden and Kentish Town, North London, finally reached the end of the road. For Deliveroo, the result is a substantial victory. The decision means the company is protected from the need to collectively bargain with a union over fundamental issues such as the lack of a guaranteed minimum wage. The Supreme Court decided that riders were correctly described as self-employed, and that Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights – which guarantees the rights of freedom of assembly and association – does not give self-employed people the right to collective bargaining. The company can continue to operate a system that can pay riders as little as £2 an hour, can lead to 70+ hour working weeks, and thus exposes riders to health and safety risks.

The justification for self-employment for Deliveroo workers is a “substitution clause” in their contract that allows riders to get someone else to do orders for them. This clause exploits a loophole in employment law, and is the reason why Deliveroo workers have been classified as self-employed while Uber's drivers are now legally workers after a 2021 Supreme Court decision. In Deliveroo's case, the courts accept that the substitution clause is rarely used, and may well have been introduced specifically to prevent the reclassification of riders as workers.

For the general public, the decision should be a warning. Democratic rights in the workplace have been under attack for more than 40 years now, with the Trade Union Act 2016 and Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023 setting the minimum turnout requirement for ballots on industrial action at 50% and giving employers in essential services the right to force workers to turn up on strike days. The UK now has trade union laws befitting an authoritarian state, and this latest judgment has blunted one possible avenue of response – all because of a technicality. Deliveroo is a company that spends much of its time and energy on shaping the legal environment through its lobbying, and so preventing its riders being counted as employees or workers is a fundamental step towards protecting its high-exploitation business model. Its initial “disruption” of labour law that began in 2013 is increasingly being consolidated as a new normal of precarious work.

The challenge facing Deliveroo riders is fundamentally the same as that confronting workers across Britain. We face a dire combination of emboldened companies cutting real wages, intensifying work and undermining legal protections, and two major political parties that are fundamentally unwilling to grant workers the democratic right to organise in the workplace. With stagnant economic growth, flatlining productivity and an unfolding climate crisis threatening the long-term stability of the global economic system, any fundamental improvement in working-class living conditions will need to be won in the face of determined opposition from above. Perhaps it is not a surprise that strike action, which was so dormant for so long, has decisively increased. If Deliveroo riders want to win a better deal, they'll have to fight – just like the rest of us.

Source: The Guardian

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Take in a sunset, a snowstorm or a baby's cry, and see why AI is no threat to art

Contemplating the correlation between scientific and technological advancements and human happiness reveals a stark reality, reminiscent of the revelation brought about by a photograph unveiling the moon's surface, extinguishing millennia of humanity's enchanting fantasies. In a parallel vein, today's harsh reality witnesses technology reducing age-old modes of poetic expression and the warmth of art to a somewhat barbaric artifice.

Throughout the development of society, new technological discoveries have shaped the course of humankind. From the primal discovery of fire to the emergence of language for communication, music and dance, each step represented an expression of humanity's desire to communicate and transmit messages. Ancient cave paintings depicting hunting scenes and people in motion, and the mineral-red handprints on mountain cliffs provide glimpses into the thoughts of our ancestors. In their struggles and fights, they found inspiration in the flowing of blood and the beating of their hearts, fostering a renewed understanding of themselves and a heightened passion for life. Despite life's challenges and the formidable forces of nature, humans persist in walking out of their metaphorical caves. The extent of their fantasies surpasses the potent fears in their hearts. Courage and confidence for living stem from the exploration of the inner worlds.

The rapid development of technology, including the rise of AI, fails to bring genuine wellbeing to humanity; instead, it fosters anxiety and panic. AI, despite all the information it obtains from human experience, lacks the imagination and, most importantly, the human will, with its potential for beauty, creativity, and the possibility of making mistakes.

With the advent of AI, the prevailing belief was that its formidable processing capabilities rendered it capable of accomplishing virtually anything. Indeed, AI has proven adept at replacing numerous tasks involving information collection and processing, a trend accentuated by its increasing strength and expanding scope in response to growing industrial demands. The acquisition of knowledge, skills and modes of thinking that once demanded a human effort of 10 to 20 years can now be expeditiously processed by AI in a seemingly mythical span of seconds. This transformative shift may instigate subversive changes in production, societal structure and productivity. Yet while AI generates outputs characterised by rationality, it inherently lacks the depth of human experience, original ideas and creativity.

Art grapples with issues transcending rationality. Consequently, the advent of AI does not present a challenge to art itself; instead, it challenges the traditional understanding of how humans acquire artistic skills, which posits that art must be cultivated through training to master techniques. Consider Rembrandt, ceaselessly painting his own portrait. What was he seeking? His pursuit was the elusive understanding of a self that remains perpetually unknown. AI lacks the capacity for such introspection. While it can replace certain technological skills, it falters in expressing the nuances of a sunset, a snowstorm, a baby's cry or an old man's tear. Since its inception, this deficiency has marked its existence, with the most significant issue being its lack of human nature and the inherent confidence that human nature carries. True confidence is forged when human weaknesses are comprehended, recognising that everyone is prone to making mistakes. In this paradigm, mistakes serve as the foundation for the perpetual search for truth.

Source: The Guardian

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The Guardian view on the future of libraries: an old question of human dignity in a new form

“Libraries gave us power,” sang the Manic Street Preachers in the opening line of their 1996 hit, *A Design for Life*. It was a customised version of an inscription that their lyricist and bassist Nicky Wire had spotted above the entrance to a Victorian library building in Pill, a neighbourhood in Newport in South Wales.

Pill library has since been repurposed, but the lyric has travelled around the world. In 2009, it was inscribed on a commemorative plaque at the opening of the new Cardiff central library, at which the Manics were invited to perform. “The weight of those almost Orwellian words became intertwined with an idea about what the miners had given back to society when they built municipal halls and centres across the country – beautiful looking institutes that they proudly left for future generations,” said Wire. Hundreds of local libraries have closed since then, but the invocation of them as a badge of civic pride, and of reinvestment of hard-earned capital in the wellbeing of communities, is as valid as it ever was – even though many now use them as much to access the internet, meet friends, or simply to keep warm, as to borrow copies of *Animal Farm* or *1984*.

The threats to libraries have for a long time been a shape-shifting army of demons advancing on all fronts. On one flank came the proliferation of discounting deals between publishers and booksellers, making buying books cheaper; on another, successive governments have borne down on the local authorities that are largely responsible for funding them. Some even argue that the digital word is so ubiquitous, and so well-served by search engines, that who needs bricks and mortar, paper copies or librarians at all any more?

October’s cyber-attack on the British Library, randomly unfortunate though it may have been, offers a timely warning about assuming that the future of libraries is online. The attack has so far closed it down to all but in-person visitors for two months. The good news is that from Monday, access to the library’s main catalogue, and key collections that are not available anywhere else, will be restored. The bad news is that it will take time for the rest of the collection to get up and running in a systems rebuild, the total cost of which is yet unknown but is likely to eat up a sizeable proportion of its reserves.

So many scholars will still have to visit in person, and consult real librarians, to track down research material. “It has been a sobering couple of months ... and what happened to us in October has implications for the whole collections sector,” wrote the British Library’s Chief Executive, Roly Keating, last week. The immediate implication is that no library in the world is safe until cybersecurity catches up with new generations of criminals.

The global democratisation of information that digitisation of the great libraries has enabled in the last decade is both impressive and progressive. But criminals are not the only threats: online access is vulnerable to everything from wars and hostile regimes to power outages. So, too, are buildings filled with books, and people to track them down. To keep their millennia-old place as bastions of civilisation, both grand scholarly institutions and humble community libraries must be financially supported to continue offering both. Take it from *A Design for Life*: “What price now / For a shallow piece of dignity”?

Source: The Guardian

This article has been edited for exam purposes

ESCP BS - ORAL CONCOURS 2024 - ANGLAIS - LVB

‘Cheaper to save the world than destroy it’: why capitalism is going green

The root of the climate crisis is “not capitalism but the corruption of capitalism”, according to the author of a new book on how people, policy and technology are working to stop the planet from heating. Akshat Rathi, a climate reporter with financial news outlet Bloomberg, argues that smart policies can harness capitalism to cut carbon pollution without killing markets or competition. “It is now cheaper to save the world than destroy it,” he writes, adding that this holds true even when viewed through a narrow capitalist lens.

In *Climate Capitalism*, Rathi runs through stories of success and failure that have helped people invent clean technologies, develop them into profitable products and build them at scale. His search takes him from an industrial park in Fujian, China’s electric battery capital, to a vast solar plant on former farmland in Pavagada, a drought-stricken region in India, to drill-scarred fields that may soon store carbon in Texas, the heart of the oil and gas industry in the US. In each case, he says, capitalist systems are being moulded to push money and people away from pollution.

In the US, the government passed the Inflation Reduction Act to throw money at clean technologies. In Europe, where support for climate action is broader, the EU has been able to punish polluters as well as subsidise clean alternatives – though with less money and more bureaucracy than in the US.

In China, which has become the world’s electric vehicle and battery factory, the Communist Party has pumped money into national companies while attracting private investment and empowering entrepreneurs. “The Chinese form of capitalism is very jingoistic,” said Rathi. “It’s aimed at creating national champions that can serve Chinese demand first and foremost, but then go out and satisfy global demand.”

But it is India, where Rathi was born, that provides the most relevant example. “India has a much different form of capitalism because it’s a much less developed economy. It comes from socialist roots, it’s trying to bring in global investors. But it has corruption, it has weak governance, its infrastructure is not quite up to scratch. So it’s unable to absorb as much capital as it would like from the capitalistic economy.”

When Rathi thought about sticking solar panels on his parents’ home in Nashik in 2019, he found it was easy to buy and install them, and that they would pay back quickly. But the distribution company took months to connect the system to the grid. What’s more, he found, renewable energy suppliers were forced to hold big reserves of cash because the distributors – hamstrung by government rules and held back by issues like stolen power – often delayed their payments by two to three months.

Such problems may seem small but are common headaches for households and businesses across Asia, Africa and South America. The price of solar panels has plummeted to make them the cheapest source of electricity in the world but the upfront costs are still too high in many countries, particularly where banks are reluctant to help out with loans. The cost of capital for a big solar farm is typically two or three times higher in emerging economies than in advanced economies or China, according to the International Energy Agency, and similar problems plague other green industries.

Source: The Guardian

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