

# THE NEW ECONOMICS ZINE

PEOPLE. PLANET. POWER.

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## GENERATIONAL WARFARE OR GENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY?

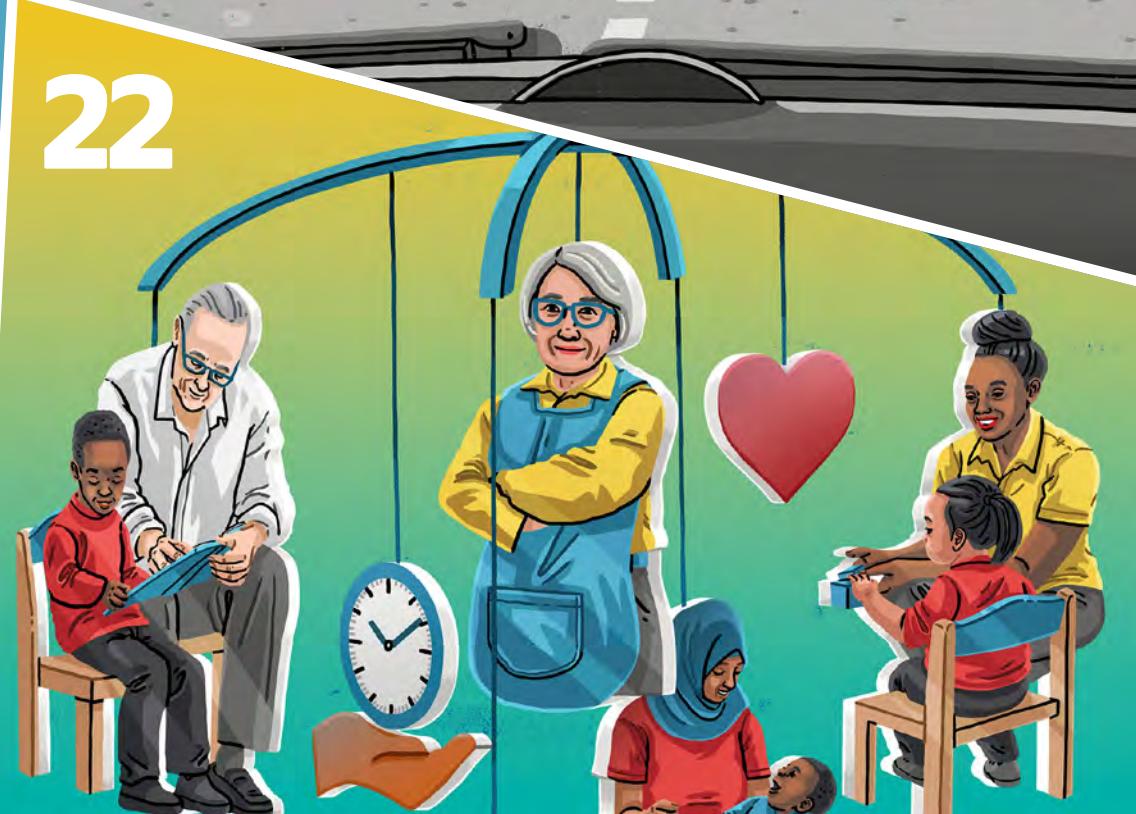
ARE OLD AND YOUNG MORE UNITED THAN DIVIDED?

Featuring: Keir Milburn, Emma Dowling, Roman Krznaric, Veronica Deutsch, and many more



ISSUE 6

# GENERATIONAL WARFARE OR GENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY?



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# COME TOGETHER

"Woke generation know nothing about the world – their ignorance is dangerous and fuelled by TikTok and Instagram lies," screams the Sun. In the Telegraph, Eric Kauffman declares: "A clear majority of British schoolchildren are being indoctrinated with cultural socialist ideas." Conservative MP David Davies claims that he would "much rather children be taught maths A-Level than that there are 72 genders, thank you very much."

**W**hen it comes to the younger generations, right-wing discourse has found a new message. When running for Tory Party leader, Rishi Sunak said he wanted to tackle “lefty woke culture”. He then appointed a ‘free speech tsar’ as part of his ‘war on woke’, with the powers to ‘protect freedom of speech from being stifled on university campuses’. In June an education minister said that there was “an insidious censorship bubbling away under the surface” at UK universities.

The implication is that the UK’s young people are being indoctrinated by sinister forces, to the bafflement and rage of older segments of the population.

It feels like everywhere younger people are being pitted against older. And it’s easy to see why the younger generations feel embattled. This government has made it compulsory to show ID in order to vote in elections – but while travel passes for older people are accepted as photo ID, young people’s travel cards don’t count. Since the turn of the millennium, house prices have gone up by 224%, while wages have only increased 94%, locking younger people out of secure homes and confining them to the insecure private rented sector.

We’ve got an election on the horizon, yet another recession nipping at our heels, and the tail-end of a pandemic dragging on. Young people have been dubbed ‘Generation Covid’, having to learn through screens, spend uni locked in their halls, and graduate into soaring inflation and high rents. Meanwhile, millennials have been unable to reach those traditional markers of adulthood – buying a home and starting a family – because of our broken economic model.

When it comes to older generations, it’s a common refrain that they’ve had it easy – but that overlooks the very real problems older people face. The retirement age creeps ever out of reach, loneliness is an epidemic and people can no longer rely on our health and social care systems to keep them well.

From zoomers doing TikTok dances to millennials buying avocados and boomers sitting pretty in their expensive houses, there’s an abundance of stereotypes about different generations. But are they actually true? The right-wing is creating culture wars which drive a wedge between ‘sensible’ older people and ‘woke’ younger people – but are we really so divided? Does focusing on the generational divide obscure more important factors like class and race? If there’s more that unifies the different generations than divides us, how can everyone come together to demand a new economy?

We’re very excited to present to you the sixth issue of the New Economics Zine, which attempts to dig into some of these big questions. From pregnancy to our ageing population, childcare to inheritance tax, we look at how a generational divide can be transformed into generational

solidarity. Keir Milburn kicks us off with a piece setting out the growing political divide between the old and young, and how it is being weaponised by right-wing politicians looking to push a culture war agenda.

Veronica Deutsch writes about how our broken childcare system impacts not just children, but also their parents and grandparents. Children’s outcomes are also affected when their mothers are forced to give birth in prison, as Janey Starling shows when she shares the words of incarcerated mothers. Milo Summers writes about how, caught in a three-way crush between high rent, insufficient maintenance loans, and inflation, hundreds of students at the University of Manchester saw no other option than to go on a rent strike.

Emma Dowling contributes our long read, which sets out the big picture of the UK’s care crisis: from childcare to elder care, generations are being played off against each other in order to strip away vital resources. But cross-generational solidarity could hold the key to a solution. Dan Goss from Demos writes about how money and property passed down through inheritances could create one of the most significant financial divides of the next decade – and how a new conversation around inheritance tax could help.

And while different generations are impacted differently by our broken economy, broad generational brush strokes can also obscure some significant divergences within generations. Hannah Frances from the Runnymede Trust explains how ‘adultification’ means young people of colour aren’t afforded the same childhood innocence as white children. And Mikey Erhardt from Disability Rights UK shares how the common narrative of the housing crisis affecting young and old differently doesn’t pan out when you consider disabled people.

Ultimately, so much that needs to change in our economy can only be solved through people of different generations coming together to demand something better. Rev Mark Coleman, who was jailed for five weeks earlier this year for sitting in the road during an Insulate Britain protest, talks about being a retiree fighting to preserve a liveable planet for future generations, and how the climate movement can bring together people of all ages. And we reprint a piece from Roman Krznaric on how future generations are disenfranchised because they have no voice when it comes to the decisions made today which will affect them in the future. Roman sets out ways that we can redesign democracy to account for this.

We hope you find this issue of the New Economics Zine thought provoking, stimulating and hopeful. Special thanks to Sofie Jenkinson, who founded the New Economics Zine, and who has now handed its custody to us.

*Enjoy!  
Margaret Welsh and Katrina Gaffney*

# THE ANTI-WOKE MORAL PANIC AND THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

Young people are turning to the left while the older generations move to the right, or so the story goes. **Keir Milburn** explains why we might be seeing a political divergence along age lines.





The last decade has witnessed the opening up of a generational political divergence of unprecedented scale. The general picture is this: young people have been moving towards the left, while older generations have overwhelmingly been voting for the right and adopting conservative social and political views. It's a widespread, though not universal, trend which, although it emerged in many different countries at roughly the same time, takes its clearest form in the UK and US.

The trend has proven incredibly persistent. Millennials, roughly those currently aged between 25 and 40, are the first generation to buck the post-war trend to become more conservative as you age. This is causing conservatives no little concern. With the creation of too few new Conservative voters to replace those who are dying off, they can see a looming demographic timebomb. It's a fear that's important to understand as it lies beneath many current right-wing political and cultural tendencies.

Culture war narratives and 'anti-woke' discourse are in effect a means of diminishing and dismissing the grievances of the young while providing conspiratorial explanations for the generational divide in politics. The young are moving to the left, the anti-woke story goes,

**“Culture war narratives and ‘anti-woke’ discourse are in effect a means of diminishing and dismissing the grievances of the young while providing conspiratorial explanations for the generational divide in politics.”**

# SCENE SETTER

**“It’s easy to see how narratives which argue we are individually responsible for the outcomes in our lives are more attractive to those who have, on at least some measures, done better than they might have expected.”**

because they've been indoctrinated into censorious intolerance by cabals of leftist teachers and lecturers. It's a ludicrous proposition but that hasn't stopped it having real world effects. While the Stop Woke Act instituted by Florida Governor Ron De Santis is the most notorious example, prohibiting discussion of racism, oppression, and economic inequality in schools, colleges or workplaces, the UK has its own iterations with, for instance, the moral panics about free speech at universities feeding into catastrophic defunding of the humanities.

For the most part these stories function as comforting morality tales for those doing well from the situation, but as causal explanations they simply don't work. A phenomenon like the generational divide in politics, which emerged suddenly on an international scale, must have been triggered by something equally sudden and international. The financial crisis of 2008 fits the bill. That event, and the way it played out across the 2010s, crystallised a longer-term divergence of material interests between the generations. Those over 55, but especially over 65, who own their own home and have pensions invested in stocks and shares, have found their interests increasingly aligned with the performance of the linked finance and real estate sectors. If the stock market booms, then the value of their pensions increases; if property prices are high, they will feel wealthier and can borrow more from their banks. This has not been true for the young whose access to home ownership has dramatically diminished. They are overwhelmingly dependent on income from work, and wages in UK have

performed terribly. They are currently pegged at the level they were in 2005. That's 18 years of zero wage growth, a period of wage stagnation not seen since the Napoleonic wars.

Although these trends were evident before 2008, they were massively accelerated by subsequent government policies which have favoured finance and inflated asset prices, from the hundreds of billions spent bailing out the banks to the tsunami of free money (quantitative easing) central banks have handed over to the financial sector. Incredibly low interest rates have, by making it unattractive to keep money in the bank, added to a glut of liquid cash looking for a home. Yet business investment in the UK has been relatively flat. Why invest in new technology and job-producing industry when higher returns can be found speculating on real estate and stocks?

As this state of affairs accorded with the interests of the asset-rich elderly, even if only by proxy, it's little wonder they've tended to vote for more of the same – but this low-growth, low-interest, high-asset price world offered little hope for the young. The recent pandemic-related economic recession is, along with the accelerating impacts of climate change, pushing us into a new economic situation of persistent high inflation and high interest rates, but while the previous situation persisted the state of the world looked very different to young and old owing to the different positions they occupied in the economy.

While these divergent experiences offer the context for diverging world views they don't, on their own, explain the content of those views. For that

we should look a little more closely at anti-woke discourse and action. Florida's Stop Woke Act bans teaching the idea that people are oppressed based on their race or gender, or that a person "bears personal responsibility for and must feel guilt, anguish, or other forms of psychological distress... because of actions committed in the past by other members of the same race, color, national origin, or sex". Behind the fallacious use of the language of equality the real aim is clear: to eliminate any argument that individual outcomes have structural causes. If you want further evidence of the centrality of this focus just look at the moral panic around 'critical race theory'. That's even more explicit in its aim to ban structural conceptions of racism.

It's easy to see how narratives which argue we are individually responsible for the outcomes in our lives are more attractive to those who have, on at least some measures, done better than they might have expected. It's also easy to see why it's an unattractive narrative for those who have had their expectations of the good life confounded. I'd argue that openness to structural explanations of social phenomena is the key content of the generational divergence in views. Supporting evidence for this comes from unexpected quarters. A recent report from the centre-right think tank Onward found that Millennials "think equality should be prioritised over economic growth and that a person's position in society is due to outside factors rather than individual effort".

The Onward report titled Missing Millennials in reference to the Conservatives' lack of voters in

that cohort, offers a more analytical approach to the generation gap but it still attempts to play down the problem. It points to polling showing Millennial dislike of increased taxes as evidence that they can still be won over to Conservatism, yet this argument only appears convincing when abstracted from its context. The repayment of student debt effectively acts as a 9% tax on graduates who reach the annual taxable income threshold, just £25,000 for 2023 graduates. This means young graduates have incredibly high marginal tax rates of up to 71%. Little wonder that they are sceptical of increased taxes.

In opposition to the idea that young people are merely confused centrists we could offer other recent opinion polling in both the UK and the US, which reveals young people as more pro-union and pro-strike than any other generation. This is not just because they are young. Data from the US shows Gen Z, with Millennials not far behind, as far more pro-union than the Gen Xers and Baby Boomers were at their age. The same seems true in the UK, with the highest support for the recent strike wave coming from 18-34-year-olds despite the anticipation it would disrupt their lives the most.

Ultimately, however, commitments to equality and an openness to structural explanations of social phenomena are much better proxies for the world view of the young than policy preferences unconditioned by context. Such a position stands in opposition to the dominant ideology of the last 40 years. Theorists such as Wendy Brown have shown that what she calls “neoliberal responsibilisation”, the idea that we as individuals are solely responsible for the outcomes of our lives, is not something existing in the realm of ideas but has been the guiding logic for the intense program of institutional reforms of the last 30 years. The introduction of student fees, for example, was driven in large part by human capital theory in which education is recast as an investment undertaken with hopes of a satisfactory return through higher subsequent income. The rejection of such meritocratic alibis for current

inequalities is aligned with an openness to arguments in favour of fundamental structural change whenever they are offered.

Such an option will not be on offer at the next UK general election and as such the generational political division might be harder to discern for a while. The shape of generational inequality is also likely to change due to the dizzying recent rise in interest rates and the high inflation at which they are purportedly aimed. The 30% of households who have a mortgage will be subject to skyrocketing repayments as the period of fixed terms on their mortgages come to an end. This will also have a generational inflection as older cohorts are more likely to have paid off more of their mortgages or own their home outright. We don't yet know what impact this will have on people's wider world views. Much depends on the political opportunity structure that unfolds. It seems likely, however, that older homeowners may find themselves increasingly politically isolated.

*Keir is co-director of Abundance, a new organisation focussed on developing and implementing Public-Common Partnerships. He is the author of Generation Left.*

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# BRITAIN NEEDS SAVING(S)



Inheritance could be one of the most significant financial divides of the next decade. **Dan Goss** explains how we got here and who will miss out.

**P**rices are rising rapidly and wages aren't keeping up. That's the central narrative of the cost of living crisis, and it's a pervasive fact of most Britons' lives whether they're young or old. People confront it every time they do their shopping, check their energy bill, or get their pay.

This narrative does get to the heart of the problem. But another (often overlooked) part of the story is wealth – and in particular, savings. In the most recent available data (2017), half of UK households had less than a month's income in savings. One in six households have no savings at all. Many Brits are one rent increase away from homelessness or one cost of living crisis away from impoverishment.

This is no surprise. UK households save at just over half

the rate of their US counterparts, and have the fourth lowest saving rate in the OECD (out of 38 countries). Part of the blame for that lies with real wage stagnation, but it also lies with low interest rates and the failures of UK savings schemes to incentivise saving among poorer households.

This is not to say many Brits aren't wealthy. It's just that the vast majority of wealth is accumulated through increasing asset prices, particularly pension assets and homes. Renters, or those without large pension pots, are left out. And even those who do own homes or large pensions often have their wealth locked up in them – limiting their ability to use it as a month-to-month financial safety net.

So Britain needs saving – and as part of that, Britain needs savings. This is where intergenerational wealth comes into

play. The impact of inheritance on people's lives is not often discussed by politicians or the media, but it could be one of the most significant financial divides in coming decades.

Each year, over £100bn is passed on in inheritance and gifts (mainly from older generations who benefited from huge asset appreciation), and that figure is set to double over the next 20 years. So for many Britons needing savings, inheritance is coming to the rescue. Households led by people currently in their late 40s are expected to inherit, throughout their lifetime, an amount worth 96 times their average monthly earnings. That is huge – and some will get even more. It's something we at Demos are calling Britain's 'new age of inheritance'.

It's true that much of what is passed on is property, which could mean that people do not receive much cash to spend freely. Yet, most inheritors end up selling property, or renting for a monthly income boost. Only 12% use inherited property as their primary home. The result is much more cash for the vast majority of inheritors.

This windfall can thrust those with low savings into a new financial world. They can enjoy more financial security, consume more freely and maybe retire early. We know people use wealth transfers, for example, to fund homes, holidays, weddings and private school fees. But even before they get the money, those with wealthy parents can reap some benefits. In anticipation of receiving, inheritors-to-be are typically expected to spend an additional amount throughout their life worth almost a quarter of the value of the inheritance they get.

Gifts – given during people's life, often when recipients are most in need – also play a key role. The cost of living crisis is no different: over a third of UK parents of adult children anticipate giving gifts in 2022/23 to help out with living costs. Gifts also help people escape the insecurity of volatile rent prices. Over a quarter of first-time buyers benefit from financial help from friends and family, with some polls suggesting this figure is over 60% for first-time buyers under 35.

Unfortunately, those rescue efforts leave people behind. Wealth in the UK is much more unequally spread than

income; inheritance and gifts follow suit. Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) modelling of people in England born in the 1980s suggests that, while the top quarter of inheritors will receive over £284,000 throughout their lives, the bottom quarter will receive less than £30,000. The bottom tenth will inherit less than £850.

It means we will see a growing divide between the inheritance 'will haves' and 'won't haves'. The won't haves will be left to bear the full weight of the cost of living crisis, unsupported. As Demos's research shows, they also will disproportionately be those with lower incomes, without university education, of non-white ethnicity and in the north of England. These groups already have lower savings, therefore entrenching the divides.

Given these problems, and the increasingly critical role inheritance is playing, we might be happy to hear there are rumours about coming reforms to inheritance policy. Yet, it's not an ambitious new approach we're hearing about, but a cut to inheritance tax as an 'easy vote winner'.

Taken alone, a cut to inheritance tax won't help Britain navigate its choppy economic waters – and could make things worse. As Demos research shows, it may not be a vote winner either. Let's hope something more sensible is on the horizon.

*Dan is a researcher at Demos working on wealth inequality in the UK, currently looking into inheritance and inherited wealth.*

**"Wealth in the UK is much more unequally spread than income; inheritance and modelling of people in England born in the 1980s suggests that, while the top quarter of inheritors will receive over £284,000 throughout their lives, the bottom quarter will receive less than £30,000. The bottom tenth will inherit less than £850."**

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# AT HOME IN THE HOUSING MOVEMENT

When it comes to housing, it's easy to think that young people are trapped in insecure rented homes while older people are comfortable homeowners. But for disabled people, as **Mikey Erhardt** explains, the story doesn't quite match up.

**C**an you remember the last time you were waiting for something important? The pressure building whilst you wait for an answer?

Every day, up and down the country, Disabled people are waiting to hear back about accessible housing. We might be waiting for our council to tell us if an accessible home is available or for an adaptation to make our homes safer. Often, we are waiting to hear if our benefits will even cover our rent.

When it comes to housing, Disabled people wait years to hear good news. Meanwhile, the UK's housing system drains our energy, spirit and independence.

Often when we talk about the problems in our housing system, we talk in binaries: young people are stuck renting, while older people have the stability of owning their own home.

But this is not the reality for Disabled people. We are less likely to own our homes across all ages, with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) finding

that older Disabled people can be up to 20% less likely to own their homes than their non-disabled peers. Disabled people are far more reliant on social housing rather than homeownership, and our homes rarely suit our needs.

For non-disabled people, it can be hard to picture the reality of living in an inaccessible home. We aren't asking for luxuries or vanity items – we are demanding to be provided with the homes to which we have a right.

Disabled people make up one-fifth of the UK population, yet many outside our circles don't understand that inaccessible homes are unsafe, may worsen our impairments or health conditions, and directly stop us from living independent, active, fulfilling lives regardless of age.

This lack of understanding has led to a situation where our homes are in dire need of adaptations. These changes are often straightforward, like installing stair-lifts, level-access showers and wet-rooms, wash and dry toilets, ramps, or wider doors. These considerations

really should be made when houses are built in the first place, but in lieu of that we have to adapt existing housing.

But adaptations aren't cheap, with the average adaptation provided by the government-funded disabled facilities grant now more than £9,000. And as more and more of us are forced to live in the private rented sector, we face an even harder task to make changes. Only 8% of disabled facilities grant applications coming from private tenants, with many of us often denied adaptations by landlords who don't want Disabled equipment fitted into our homes.

The lack of accessible or adapted homes means many of us are forced to stretch our already meagre entitlement to social care support further, just because our homes aren't adapted or accessible. Imagine how you would feel if you couldn't shower without support because a landlord refuses to install something as simple as a rail.

The issues that plague our unequal housing system have bled into every



# “Right now, we are living through a renaissance in the national struggle for housing – but so many spaces for housing justice are not accessible.”

part of the country. An overwhelming 91% of homes do not provide even the lowest level of accessibility, leaving less than one in 10 homes suitable for us to live in.

Our nation's inability to create the homes we need is depriving new generations of Disabled people of their right to an independent life. New reporting from the Big Issue showed that more and more young Disabled people are forced to live with parents for too long, in houses often too small or ill-suited to their needs, because of a lack of affordable, accessible options. Older Disabled people often report feeling isolated and trapped in their inaccessible homes, cut off from their local community and support networks.

1.8 million Disabled people have an accessible housing need, and demands for increased social housebuilding must be met with action from the government. New social homes need to have better minimum accessibility standards.

Unfortunately, this government has put the brakes on an extensive consultation process which was meant to detail how minimum accessibility standards for new builds would be raised and how that change would be implemented.

Older Disabled people will be all too familiar with the lack of drive shown by governments to fix our broken system. Many will remember how by the early 1990s, the number of wheelchair-accessible homes built by housing associations dropped to under 70 per year.

As the saga around new building standards shows no signs of ending, let's make it clear: we can't just build our way out of this crisis.

Research continues to show how important fixing our existing stock will be if we are to meet our climate

targets and avoid a devastating climate emergency. The UK has some of the draughtiest housing in Europe, and our heating relies heavily on fossil gas, meaning that homes make up a big chunk of our carbon footprint. The scale of the issue is daunting, with new Health Foundation research finding that 15% of all Disabled households live in non-decent homes. But as we try and tackle the climate impact of our crumbling housing stock, accessibility must not be lost in the mix.

We deserve homes adapted to our needs, but there's no reason they can't become warmer, safer and more environmentally sustainable. Making our homes better unites us all, no matter our age. Everyone deserves a sustainable future in a safe, comfortable home.

But policy is just one part of the system that must change. Right now, we are living through a renaissance in the national struggle for housing – but so many spaces for housing justice are not accessible.

Often at a practical level, activist groups prioritise meeting in person, which can exclude Disabled people. The continued circulation of Covid-19 is incredibly dangerous for some Disabled people, limiting our ability to participate. Sometimes the housing movement prioritises individuals from the same backgrounds and experiences, favouring the ability to craft a good email over the lived experience that so many of us can bring.

A quality home is an accessible home. We know the movement needs our energy, experience and expertise, but it must make space for us.

Disabled people have agency and power, but activists must make spaces accessible in order to work with us. Basic steps like considering our access needs and adjusting spaces to suit,

matching our communication needs (such as making sure British Sign Language interpretation is available) and making the effort to ensure hybrid meetings are fluid and engaging are still missing across our movement. You can't just say “in person is better” and absolve yourself of making sure your organising spaces are as accessible as they can be.

We can only make small changes as individuals, no matter how many followers we have online, emails we send, or councils we call. What will make change is building local power, whether with a local Disabled people's organisation, organising a group of Disabled people in our neighbourhoods, creating a block group or joining a tenants or renters union.

Together Disabled people of all ages can fight and win! We all deserve a home where we can flourish – one that is safe, warm and adapted to our needs. And you can bet we will fight for them no matter how old we are.

*Mikey Erhardt is policy and campaigns officer at Disability Rights UK, focusing on housing and social care, and is an active housing union organiser.*

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# WHO GETS TO BE A KID?

Young people of colour are perceived as ‘more adult’ than their peers – often with devastating consequences.

**Hannah Francis** explains why this happens.



**C**urrently, police are approximately seven times more likely to stop and search Black people, and six times more likely to strip search Black children. 78% of those listed on the Met’s Gangs Matrix are Black, and Black people are over five times more likely than white people to have force used against them.

There is a worrying pattern of the expansion of police powers through pre-criminalising orders such as criminal behaviour orders, knife crime prevention orders and serious violence reduction orders, all for crime prevention tactics that don’t work, and instead come at a great cost to minority ethnic communities who are directly harmed by these practices.

Young people are disproportionately targeted and forced through our broken criminal justice system at a great cost to them, their futures, and their communities. How can it be that the institutions that are supposed to keep our young people safe are doing the opposite? And why is it that young people of colour are bearing the brunt of this harm?

The lack of safeguarding concerns for these young people is in part due to racialised bias amongst state forces, which often shows its form in the adultification of minority ethnic children. Adultification can be understood as instances in which “notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children”, namely young people that are

racialised and/or from working-class and marginalised communities.

The narrative persists that young minority ethnic people can be supported through ‘tough on crime’ policies, which directly harm and alienate them. This is a continued dereliction of the state’s duty to keep children safe and it does nothing to consider the complex social issues which are often the root causes of crime. Instead, youth violence is framed around racialised tropes that feed moral panic about ‘gangs’, ‘knife crime’ and ‘county lines’.

At what point is anyone considering how we can actually support young people and children who are often forced into criminal activity because of their material conditions? As we know, austerity has resulted in 70% cuts to youth services in the last 13 years, real terms spending cuts to mental health services, and a cost of living crisis that disproportionately impacts racialised groups. The state has effectively abdicated its responsibility to provide young, working class, and otherwise marginalised people with a safe and secure future.

Adulitification is a constant thread which enables this continued harm. The damage inflicted is perpetuated and justified because minority ethnic children aren’t viewed as vulnerable or in the same need of protection as others. Instead, because of racialised tropes, they are seen as ‘more adult’ or ‘more threatening’ than other children. The abhorrent rates of strip searches conducted on minority ethnic children without the due safeguarding measures is a troubling illustration of this, whereby children are repeatedly failed by the state institutions which are supposedly there to protect them. This bias is not new – it’s been upheld for decades to curb the rights of young minoritised ethnic people to state protection and care when navigating the criminal justice system.

Young children of colour are experiencing traumatising incidents of racial stereotyping, including violent and intimate searches of their person, which impacts both their emotional wellbeing and relationship to services which in theory are there to protect them. Young Black people in particular have alarmingly low levels of trust in the police, with only 36% of them feeling like they can trust the police overall.

“**Adulitification can be understood as instances in which ‘notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children’, namely young people that are racialised and/or from working class and marginalised communities.”**

The harrowing case of the Manchester 10, a group of young Black boys from the North East, who were served a collective punishment of 131 years in prison for text messages, exemplifies the severity of the impact of adulitification. Following the murder of their friend, youth leader and aspiring rapper Alexander ‘John’ Soyoye in November 2020, the boys joined an online chat via Telegram venting their anger and grief at such a significant loss. Although none of the 10 were involved in revenge attacks, the supposed organiser of the group chat was, leading to an investigation of the messages.

All of these boys were sentenced for conspiring to commit acts of harm, including murder. Rooted in adulitification and the racial stereotyping of young Black boys we all know too well, the Manchester 10 were painted as a ‘gang’ with intent to cause grievous bodily harm – an entirely false narrative. They are just young boys, grieving their friend. The continual targeting of young Black kids, with no regard for their safeguarding or the needs of their families who have likely experienced similar treatment, carries deep intergenerational trauma.

The disconnect between our communities, young people and the police will become further entrenched with the ramping up of stop and

search, strengthening the mistrust of British police forces many of us have had for decades. We need to see our government respond to increasing calls to limit the scope of policing and instead channel investment into people’s wellbeing and communities. In a climate in which young people of colour are experiencing higher levels of serious mental health distress – including conditions like schizophrenia and post-traumatic stress disorder – why double down on powers which harm them? Instead, we must give young people of colour the care they need.

*Hannah is a research analyst working on numerous major projects and ongoing programmes across the Runnymede Trust.*

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# PREGNANT IN PRISON



Pregnant women are being forced to give birth in prison, affecting their own and their children's life chances. **Janey Starling** explains why no woman should be imprisoned in pregnancy.

**P**rison will never be the best start to a child's life. That should be obvious to anyone. Yet, in the past year, 50 women gave birth while spending time in prison. The deaths of two babies in prisons in recent years have turned the public's attention toward the dangers of jailing pregnant women. However, the problems go far beyond birthing. Imprisoning mothers causes intergenerational harm.

Anita\* was pregnant whilst in prison, gave birth to her son whilst held there and then was moved into the prison's Mother and Baby Unit (MBU), where mothers can stay with their baby for up to 18 months. Whilst Anita was glad she wasn't separated from her son, she told me: "I don't think judges quite realise what they're doing when they send mums to MBUs. Do they not understand they're still inside prisons?"

Within the unit, prison officers totally disregarded Anita as a mother: “The guards have no respect for you, you’re always on eggshells. When my child was sick, and I wanted to get a doctor’s appointment, a guard told me he didn’t think it was necessary. It was my child, but I couldn’t even make that decision as his mother. If I had been kept in the community, I would have felt more like a mother. But in prison, all of that was stripped from me. It made me doubt my ability as a mother for a long time.”

Anita’s experience is far from unique. Research by Dr Lucy Baldwin on maternal imprisonment documents the profoundly painful impact a lack of acknowledgement of mothers’ role can have on women.

The majority of women enter prison for short sentences, for things like shoplifting. Yet, when it comes to child development, even short sentences can have a lifelong impact. This is something that Anita worries about, given her son’s pending ADHD diagnosis.

“I’m concerned there’s a link between his behaviour and the fact I had him in prison”, she said. “But nobody tells you about this.”

Rose\*, is also worried about this. She was sentenced to prison when she was pregnant and, like Anita, gave birth and lived with her baby on an MBU: “I’m convinced prison has had an adverse effect on my son that will last the rest of his life. He has been struggling with behavioural issues and I’m sure it’s due to the stress I experienced in prison. My son is suffering now because I was put there.”

When Rose was sent to prison, she was also separated from her two other children. One was 13 years old at the time and was consequently bullied at school. “She really struggled with the situation”, Rose said. “She was at such a vulnerable age and it hit her really, really hard. All the stress of all the incidents that have happened to me have affected my children too. It makes me feel so guilty, and angry”.

Article 2 of the UN convention on the rights of the child states that children have ‘the right to not be discriminated against or punished because of anything their parent has done’. Yet courts regularly violate this by sending pregnant women and mothers to prison.

While courts are meant to consider the impact of a parent’s prison sentence on dependent children, this is not consistent practice. The consequences

are devastating. Dr Shona Minson has found that the experience of having a mother in prison not only negatively impacts a child’s relationship with their mother, but ‘can affect every area of their lives including their education, health, and well being.’

It is estimated that 17,000 children every year are affected by maternal imprisonment in England and Wales. 95% of these children are forced to leave their homes as their mother’s imprisonment leaves them without an adult to take care of them.

Both Anita and Rose are involved in Level Up’s campaign to end imprisonment for pregnant women, and both believe that mothers swept up into the criminal justice system would be better supported in the community.

Rose would like to see courts “look at the background to why a woman has offended, see these women as mothers, and see what can be done to support them instead.”

Her instincts are backed up by government research. A 2007 review found that poverty, domestic abuse, mental illness and substance use were key drivers of women ending up in prison. It recommended investment in community centres to support women who are at risk of being swept up into crime instead. Specialist charity Women in Prison explains that, by the time a woman enters prison, she has often “been let down long before this point by state services and systems.”

The intergenerational harm prison causes to pregnant women, mothers and children is evident.

With mums holding breastfeeding protests outside the Ministry of Justice, and health experts writing to the Sentencing Council to demand change, the justice system is under pressure to transform its practices.

Until the government invests in alternatives to support women, prisons will continue to inflict preventable trauma on mothers and their children. As Anita concluded: “What good did it do, putting me in jail? Apart from messing up my mental health, leaving me to deal with guilt for the rest of my life, and causing my son to suffer too.”

**“What good did it do, putting me in jail? Apart from messing up my mental health, leaving me to deal with guilt for the rest of my life, and causing my son to suffer too.”**

*Janey Starling is an award-winning feminist activist and co-director of Level Up, a UK-based gender justice campaign group calling for an end to the imprisonment of pregnant women.*

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\* Names have been changed to protect identities.

# STRIKING FOR STUDENTS



Students at the University of Manchester have been withholding their rent but it goes beyond unfair costs and poor conditions – it's about the marketisation of higher education. **Milo Summers** explains.

This January, over 350 University of Manchester students refused to pay for their student accommodation to protest against high rents and poor living conditions. Initially, I joined the rent strike in solidarity, viewing my halls as in fairly good condition, if not a bit overpriced, but since then I've come to notice many issues and question why I accepted them before. Being a student should not mean I have to put up with mould in my kitchen, my hot water being cut off repeatedly, and mice and silverfish roaming free through the building.

Caught in a three-way crush between high rent, insufficient maintenance loans, and inflation, hundreds of students see no other option but to withhold rent from a university that raised the rents by 6% at a time when inflation

was only at 5.5% and maintenance loans were only being raised by 2.8%. The disparity between those three statistics demonstrates perfectly the conditions under which the 2023 Manchester Rent Strike was born.

Ashburne Hall, the accommodation I live in, is catered and located on the University of Manchester's Fallowfield Campus. This academic year the rent for a single room with a basin was £6,692 for 41 weeks, or approximately £163 a week.

There are only two accommodations owned by the university that had a rent of less than £150 a week in 2022. Both are infamous for their conditions – with rats and mould common sights.

There is a complete lack of affordable accommodation: even the lowest rents are higher than the minimum student maintenance loan. If the gap between maintenance loans

**“There are only two accommodations owned by the university that had a rent of less than £150 a week in 2022. Both are infamous for their conditions – with rats and mould common sights.”**

and rent wasn't enough to contend with, this year's students have had to deal with the cost of living crisis too. These financial conditions have led to more than one in 10 students using food banks, and a third living on less than £50 a month after rent and bills. These statistics are all too familiar to rent strikers at my university, many of whom are facing these problems themselves.

When the rent strike first started, it was estimated that £500,000 was being withheld from the university by at least 350 students. In April, that estimate jumped to £2m being withheld by at least 650 students.

This high participation in the rent strike has made me proud to be a part of this movement, pushing back against the exploitation of students for money in a fashion that can only be described as a business venture.

Even outside of direct participation in the campaign, there has been an outpouring of support from both within and outside of the university. Multiple MPs and significant union officials have signed a solidarity statement for our cause. There was a record turnout in a University of Manchester Student Union referendum. When it was put to a student vote on whether to support the demands of the rent strike, 97% out of 11,196 voted in favour.

Occupations of University of Manchester buildings have also been a vital part of the campaign. Four separate building have been occupied since 8 February 2023, including the

senior management building of the university which was fully barricaded for eight days.

These successes are not without difficulty. Student protesters have been victimised by the university at every step of the way. Disciplinaries, fines and debt collectors have all been used in an attempt to break this strike. But above all, this demonstrates that the University of Manchester is scared – scared that the rent strike is building a far larger movement than just protesting rent.

From the start, it has been at the forefront of the minds of rent strike organisers that this is about more than the exploitation of students. This fits into a pattern of increasingly concerning behaviour by the University of Manchester and other universities as their priorities shift from providing a quality university education to making a profit.

You need look no further than the ongoing University and College Union (UCU) dispute to see this. Casualisation – placing staff on fixed term contracts – has put job security at risk at the University of Manchester and other universities across the country. Inadequate pay, erosion of pensions, and high workloads are some of the ways universities exploit their staff for profit too.

It is essential that the connection between the struggles of students and staff is recognised by both sides. We resist the same enemy: the marketisation of higher education. The UCU branch at the University of Manchester has recognised this, and supports the rent strike, and we support them in their dispute unequivocally.

The problems don't stop there. Tuition fees are still unacceptably high and have been so for the last 13 years. This is not to mention that international students face fees of between £19,000 and £48,000 at the university. Recently, the students union passed a motion to support the capping of these fees.

This threefold use of rent hikes, casualisation of staff, and international fees is why the university reported £119m in operating surplus. With a strategy like this, the university would be better described as a business than an educational institution.

Students from across the country are coming to the same conclusions and reaching out to the Manchester Rent Strike to discuss how to build a movement against the marketisation of higher education and exploitation of students and staff. Movements like this one are vital for building solidarity amongst causes and mobilising the wider student body, not just the activists, against the issues they face. That much is evident in the huge referendum turnout and participation in demonstrations organised by the Manchester Rent Strike.

Higher education should not be run for profit. When this changes, accommodation can be subsidised to support students. When this changes, staff can do their jobs without concern over whether they'll have one next year. When this changes, international students can come to study in the UK without being exploited by tuition fee rates. I challenge the University of Manchester's senior management to take serious action on these issues. Don't dismiss us students, because we will not go away.

*Milo is a student activist and campaigns officer for Manchester Leftist Action.*

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# ALL AGES, ONE PURPOSE

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Retired vicar the **Rev Mark Coleman** was jailed for five weeks for sitting in a road as part of Insulate Britain's protests. Now released from prison, he writes about his experience and the intergenerational solidarity of his fellow climate activists.



**“Older people like me are waking up, hearing the call to act, inspired by the young. It feels good to be stepping up into this. My friend Ruth has it right: ‘We’ve broken their world. Now we know that the least we can do is get off our sofas, open our tool box, and see what we can do to fix it.’”**

**T**he view out of my cell window was grim. Mostly high walls and razor wire. But I felt good, at peace.

As I remembered the trial, I was grateful for the people around me. I thought of my co-defendants, both young and old, and of their courage in resisting the government’s murderous plans for fossil fuel expansion. I looked back to October 2019, when I got arrested for sitting on a London road with Extinction Rebellion. Energised by this new group of people, I had helped set up a local group in Rochdale. We made ourselves newsworthy but numbers were small. By 2021 I was getting despondent: the government was not acting and public interest was waning. When I heard about Insulate Britain, I was excited. The prospect of sitting on motorways was terrifying, but the tactics felt right for this critical moment. On October 25, after several arrests on the M25, I sat down in Bishopsgate in the city of London with around 30 others. Whereas my previous actions had led to charges for wilful obstruction of the highway, this one led to the more serious charge of public nuisance.

We were tried in groups of four and ranged in age from 28 to 73. We looked after each other. It was tough because the judge had ruled that we could not speak in front of the jury about why we had chosen to break the law. To disobey the judge risked the serious offence of contempt of court with an immediate prison sentence. We struggled to defend ourselves. Imagine my joy speaking freely at my sentencing a few weeks later. Listening to the speeches of my co-defendants had been very moving. This group, a microcosm of the larger intergenerational community, was important to me.

Something terrible and urgent, above

and beyond usual issues and politics, brought us together. It was two years ago, back in 2021, that the former UK government chief scientific adviser, Professor Sir David King, said, “What we do in the next three to four years will determine the future of humanity.” Yet, in full knowledge of the science, and against advice, the UK government is enabling new oil and gas projects. These will kill billions of people. Generational differences are of little concern when faced with such evil.

Getting reflective is perhaps a feature of older age. A friend of 52 said how sobering it was that 70% of species had become extinct in the last 50 years, her lifetime. Another said, “We have knowingly caused the doubling of CO<sub>2</sub>. No generation in history has caused greater damage ... Worse still our generation has a vice-like grip on power...” When faced with this awareness we can sink into despair or denial. It’s much healthier to choose to resist.

Before I started civil resistance I saw a placard with “You will die of old age, we will die of climate change” outside parliament. A few weeks later, a young woman told me that she had decided not to have children because of the climate crisis. It was heartbreaking. But action counters despair – like the GP from Cheshire who told me that she and her husband were protesting on the streets because of their son, who had got them to read up on climate science.

In a situation so unthinkable and frightening it is not good to be alone. A retired grandmother told me, “I’ve never felt more accepted [in Just Stop Oil]. Days spent leafleting with a 40 something were so uplifting.” Caring for each other helps us reach our potential. There are many ways people can help, from recruitment to media to admin. In our individualistic society

many of us get distracted by what George Monbiot has wonderfully called “micro consumerist bollocks.” In our communities of resistance we can come together, in all our diversity, focused on nonviolent action.

Later years bring opportunity. A friend from Christian Climate Action told me that now that she has reached a point when the kids had left home and the menopause was out of the way, she could embark on a new phase of life. For me, a diagnosis of Parkinson’s nudged me from carrying placards and into civil resistance, moving beyond what I was comfortable with, to doing what was needed.

In the face of the terrible reality of what this government is doing, it is good to stand with younger people in nonviolent resistance. Older people like me are waking up, hearing the call to act, inspired by the young. It feels good to be stepping up into this. My friend Ruth has it right: “We’ve broken their world. Now we know that the least we can do is get off our sofas, open our tool box, and see what we can do to fix it.”

*Revd Mark Coleman is a retired vicar and lives in Rochdale.*

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# CHILDCARE FOR EVERY GENERATION



Children, parents and grandparents are all suffering because of our broken childcare system. **Veronica Deutsch** explores what needs to change and how we can learn from childcare activists of the past.

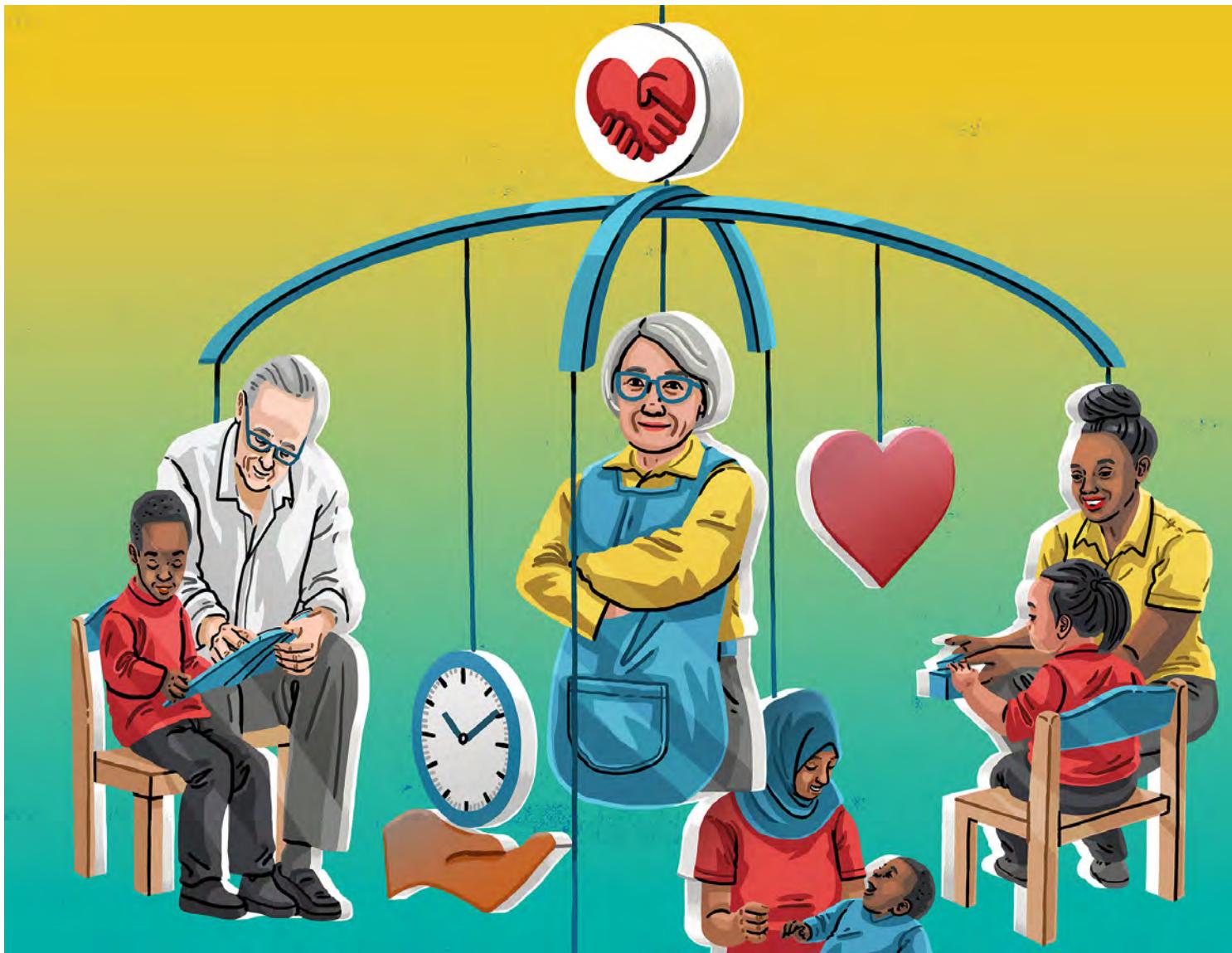
**C**hildcare is having a political moment. Following the Spring Budget, which centred childcare as a key issue, it's looking likely that the Early Years will feature heavily in the debate in the run up to the next general election – and rightly so. Families in the UK face some of the highest childcare costs in the world, while childcare workers are leaving the sector in their thousands. Despite childcare commonly being thought of as a problem for parents, the UK's childcare crisis is permeating every generation – hitting parents with rocketing childcare costs, grandparents who are increasingly relied upon for unpaid care, childcare workers struggling on low wages, and of course children themselves.

As someone who has spent their entire adult life thinking about (and

performing) paid care labour, it has been a welcome change to see childcare and early years education at the forefront of political debate. But while childcare has been a longstanding feminist issue, mainstream childcare activism is often led by its service-users rather than its workers. This shapes the framing of the most influential childcare campaigns in ways that feel unimaginative at best and actively hostile towards the workforce at worst. The common narrative of childcare as a solution to 'get women back into the workplace' – primarily through increasing childcare subsidy – feels depressingly narrow in its scope. This is especially true when you consider the exciting, radical alternatives we've seen in the past.

Historically, childcare was provided for women who were seen as 'in need' – those on low-incomes, known to social

services, or if their children had special educational needs or a disability. Yet today we see the reverse: only one in five children in the households from the bottom third of earnings in the UK are eligible for a funded nursery place, and the stringent eligibility criteria for families accessing funded places excludes migrant parents with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and students. Childcare is, increasingly, only for those who can afford it. The dominant narrative of childcare being important because it allows for parents' increased economic participation, while certainly speaking to a certain truth (that parents – particularly mothers – face barriers to work that are gendered), fails to capture the breadth and complexity of care's role in our society. So why, when we are finally being given the airtime to talk about overhauling childcare, are our demands



so limited?

We need to think outside of the bounds set by neoliberalism and start talking about radical solutions: childcare as a universal basic service – free at the point of access, or early years as non-negotiable education for under-fives, as opposed to something that helps parents ‘contribute’ to society by going back to work.

After all, the childcare crisis is not new: others have historically fought for better care with varying success, and a great deal of them are still around today, eager to share their stories. Cross-generational solidarity could provide the community, framework, and political allyship required to demand the solutions we need by helping us to understand what has come before.

Grow Your Own, an oral history project run by OnTheRecord, posits exactly this. The project examines

whether sharing the history of childcare activism across four boroughs of East London (Tower Hamlets, Newham, Hackney, Waltham Forest) can support those affected by childcare issues today. The project has several outputs including a user-generated digital map which will document past and present childcare actions across East London, an interactive events series, and a podcast series launching at the end of summer 2023. Crucially, it is also providing space for past and present childcare activists to come together for regular ‘Critical Friends’ sessions, where they can share their experiences of childcare organising and support one another to look to the past for future solutions. All of the older participants in the sessions have extensive activist experience, from building some of the first cooperative nurseries in London to leading campaigns like the National

**“We need to think outside of the bounds set by neoliberalism and start talking about radical solutions: childcare as a universal basic service – free at the point of access...”**



**“On a broader scale, many of the issues plaguing the social care sector – financialisation, low wages, long hours, high costs – mirror those in the childcare sector. Bringing social care and childcare together in campaign efforts could help strengthen both movements: pensioners make for powerful political allies, and many of them are additionally aware of the childcare crisis in its current iteration.”**

Childcare Campaign (now Coram Family & Childcare) to occupying squats in order to set up holiday clubs for mothers without access to other forms of care. Their experiences can help us realise what is possible.

Perhaps the best example of this kind of cross-generational solidarity in action is Stone Soup Group, a nascent parent-led cooperative crèche in Walthamstow, inspired by the First Neighbourhood Cooperative Nursery established in the same borough fifty years prior. Organisers from First Neighbourhood, now in their seventies and eighties, met up with Stone Soup in its infancy to lend support. Speaking to Angela, one of the group’s organisers, she tells me that, ‘They were really supportive... they identified some really big challenges and things that they learned with hindsight, so were able to give key recommendations.... like agreeing things beforehand and giving training... It’s so helpful that you’re not making things up as you go’. The group also runs an ‘intergenerational project’: ‘We know that many older people living in Walthamstow, are lonely [...] this type of interaction can decrease older people’s loneliness, delay mental decline, lower blood pressure and even reduce the risk of disease. The benefit of almost any

interaction between young and old is self-evident’.

On a broader scale, many of the issues plaguing the social care sector – financialisation, low wages, long hours, high costs – mirror those in the childcare sector.. Bringing social care and childcare together in campaign efforts could help strengthen both movements: pensioners make for powerful political allies, and many of them are additionally aware of the childcare crisis in its current iteration. Grandparents are being relied upon more and more to plug childcare gaps, and digital platforms, such as Koru Kids and GrandNannies, have gone one step further to advertise for ‘Grannies’ as childcare workers, hinting perhaps at the near-third of pensioners living in poverty. When we limit childcare framing to a problem of gender inequity, we lose the nuance of care as something that permeates all stages of the lifespan and impede ourselves from building an argument for quality care as a fundamental necessity as opposed to a political football.

Care is something we will all need, or do, at one point or another in our lives, and tying the value of care to its ability to create and retain jobs limits us in terms of how we conceptualise

its role in our society more broadly. Many are already coming together across generations to share, learn, and organise, making it clear that from community projects to care homes to the ballot box, cross-generational solidarity could hold the key to building demands that stick.

*Veronica Deutsch is a freelance researcher and community organiser who previously worked in the childcare sector and co-founded the Nanny Solidarity Network.*

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Find out more out the Stone Soup group: <https://www.stonesoupgroup.co.uk/>

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# THE TIME REBELS>>



Future generations have no say over the world they will inherit. **Roman Krzanic** sets out four ways we can redesign democracy for these voiceless people.

**D**emocracy has a blind spot so enormous that almost nobody notices it – myself included. In the decade I spent as a political scientist researching democratic governance, it simply never occurred to me that we systematically disenfranchise future generations.

They are given no rights, nor (in the vast majority of countries) are there public bodies to represent their interests or potential views on decisions that will undoubtedly affect their lives, from policies to confront the climate crisis and the regulation of artificial

intelligence to planning for the next pandemic.

The disturbing truth is that we have colonised the future. Especially in wealthy nations, we treat it as a dumping ground for ecological degradation, technological risk and nuclear waste – as if there is nobody there. And there is little that the unborn citizens of tomorrow can do about it.

The good news is that a pioneering generation of time rebels is now emerging to challenge the short-sighted political presentism at the heart of representative government, where politicians can barely see past the

next election or even the latest tweet. This vanguard movement of political activists, policymakers and engaged academics has proposed more than 70 different ways to embed long-term thinking and intergenerational justice into democratic institutions, offering a new kind of politics that I call ‘deep democracy.’ They fall into several major categories.

Public officials and institutions with the specific remit to represent future citizens who are left out of traditional democratic processes are essential – covering not just children but also unborn generations.

Wales established a Commissioner for Future Generations under the 2015 Well-Being for Future Generations Act. Its current holder, Derek Walker, is a leading time rebel for intergenerational justice who scrutinises public policy for its impacts 30 years into the future, but he has little direct power beyond the capacity to name and shame.

That's why a new campaign has been launched called Today for Tomorrow to establish a 'Future Generations Commissioner' for the whole UK, but with the legal power to hold public bodies to account for failing to act in the interests of future citizens.

## "The disturbing truth is that we have colonised the future. Especially in wealthy nations, we treat it is a dumping ground for ecological degradation, technological risk and nuclear waste – as if there is nobody there. And there is little that the unborn citizens of tomorrow can do about it."

However, such models face a potential problem of democratic legitimacy. Why shouldn't angry teenage climate strikers have a say themselves rather than having to rely on proxy adult representatives? And how can we ensure that these 'guardians of the future' tackle the full range of issues, including the way that racial injustice is transmitted intergenerationally in criminal justice systems?

The ancient Athenian model of participatory democracy has been making a comeback in the form of citizens' assemblies, where randomly selected members of the public deliberate on public issues. In 2016 the Irish parliament established a Citizens' Assembly that played an historic role in supporting a referendum on abortion. Spain and Belgium now have permanent citizens' assemblies that feed into municipal government, while in 2019 the UK parliament created Climate Assembly UK to discuss the shift to a net-zero carbon society.

What's the connection to future generations? Research by political scientist Graham Smith suggests that citizens' assemblies "outperform

traditional democratic institutions in orienting participants to consider long-term implications." In part, this is because they encourage the 'slow thinking' that's required to engage with long-range issues, but it's also because 'sortition' ensures a wide variety of social perspectives and thereby limits domination by traditional elites.

The Future Design movement in Japan is taking an innovative approach to this model. Local residents are invited to make planning decisions for their town or city but are split into two groups. One group is told that they are citizens from the present, while the

second is told to imagine themselves as citizens from 2060, and are even given ceremonial robes to wear to aid their imaginative journey. The latter group typically propose far more radical policies in areas ranging from health care to environmental protection.

A further design principle is to embed the rights of future generations into the legal system, especially constitutional law, as a means of ring-fencing their interests and protecting them from the short-termism of incumbent politicians.

It may sound far-fetched to give rights to future citizens who aren't even here to claim them, but this is already happening. In the recent 'Urgenda' case in the Netherlands in 2019, the courts drew on the European Convention on Human Rights to rule that the government has a legal duty of care to protect its citizens from the future impacts of climate change by meeting its own stated targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The challenge is that even if such cases are successful, there is the subsequent problem of enforcement: why would we expect governments to protect the rights of future people

if they so manifestly fail to protect the rights of those who are alive today, such as those fighting for indigenous rights or against police violence?

The final strategy for redesigning democracy for future generations is the radical devolution of decision-making power from central government, where it is typically captured by corporations and other vested interests bent on short-term gains. Compelling evidence from a new Intergenerational Solidarity Index reveals that countries with decentralised political systems (such as Switzerland and Japan) perform better on indicators of long-term environmental, social and economic performance.

Devolving power to the city level may be the most effective means of benefiting future generations, because cities have proven themselves to be far better than nation-states at tackling long-term problems such as ecological degradation, migration pressures and housing crises. For example, think back to June 2017 when – just weeks after President Trump withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement – 279 US mayors representing one in five Americans pledged to uphold the agreement in their own cities such as Boston and Miami.

It is wishful thinking to believe that simply voting in politicians who support long-term policies would be enough to secure the interests of future generations. Short-termism is too deeply structured into the DNA of representative democracy. That's why we need radical institutional change that designs short-sightedness out of the political system.

There may be no better way of reviving faith in the democratic ideal than by granting a rightful place to the 'futureholders' – the unborn, unknown citizens of the future. It is time to expand the boundaries of the demos forward in time. Or as the philosopher John Dewey put it, "the cure for the ailments of democracy is more democracy."

*This piece was originally published on OpenDemocracy UK*

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LONG READ

# Care and capitalism

The UK is experiencing a care crisis – but instead of playing generations off against each other, we need solidarity to build a sustainable care system, writes **Emma Dowling**.



**T**he UK is experiencing an ongoing care crisis – one in which different sections of the population are played off against one another. This is a point at which the politics of austerity and the neoliberal imperative of competition come together to produce a particularly harmful way of governing society, in which different groups of people are forced to fight over access to scarce resources. Rather than fight each other, we should figure out how to resist the further entrenchment of divides, while building sustainable care infrastructures based on cross-generational solidarity. However, to do so, we need to drill down through the symptoms of this crisis to what their structural causes are: from the lack of access to adequate care, to the appalling conditions and low or no pay under which care is expected to be provided.

When it comes to care, often the needs of people who give care are placed in opposition to those who receive it. This is especially prevalent in concerns over the cost of care, where the urgent necessity for improving pay and working conditions in the care sector collides with people's fears of not being able to afford care in old age, should they require it. The growing care crisis also threatens to play out across generations, as the economic situation of younger people is impacted by years of austerity and privatisation, while the generation that is now retiring is seen to have benefitted from the post-war commitment to public services and social mobility. When younger adults experience less economic security and fewer improvements to their standards of living than those people who are currently of retirement age, younger generations are put in conflict with older generations.

While those at the very top of society have managed to immunise themselves from austerity and economic difficulties that have become more acute since the global financial crisis of 2008, those at the lower end have been exposed to increased precarity and insecurity. Terms such as the 'squeezed middle' or the 'just-about-managing' mark a new dividing line that also reaches into the middle class, affecting parts of the population who once considered themselves relatively secure. The so-called 'sandwich generation' of middle-aged people who have children and older relatives to care (or pay) for struggle to deal with the multiple demands of having to go out to work to earn an income and manage large amounts of unpaid care work in the face of cuts to public services.

In the UK, a country where childcare for pre-school children is among the most expensive in the world, more than half of parents with young children regularly rely on grandparents to look after their grandchildren so that they can go out to work. At the same time, these grandparents'

own care bills are rising, because funding cuts and more stringent eligibility criteria for social care have caused a surge in people having to pay for their own care. The systematic underfunding of social care is long-standing and entrenched, exacerbated by years of austerity. Means testing is so restrictive that many people who might have previously been able to access care and support are unable to do so today.

Since 2010, the threshold at which people pay for their own social care has been frozen, meaning it has fallen in real terms, pushing more people into paying for social care privately, or going without. Today, an estimated 1.6 million older people don't get the support that they need, while the support structures for people with disabilities have also been made much worse. While the number of adults receiving care remained approximately the same between 2005 and 2014, the total number of hours of unpaid caring rose by almost 25 percentage points in this period. This reflects a significant rise in the amount of continuous care being provided at home, more often than not by female members of households or families.

Current demographic changes mean that we are steering towards a situation in which more of us will be living much longer, with complex care needs that will require support and assistance. Over the next 25 years, the population above the age of 85 will almost double. And yet, the trajectory we are on in terms of the financing and organisation of health and social care in older age is one that promises to merely deepen divides, both within generations and also across them. This is privatisation in two senses: in the foregrounding of care as a personal responsibility and in the marketisation of care.

The relationship between care and capitalism has always been crisis prone. This is because the care of the population – whether to maintain the health of an existing workforce, nurture and educate a future one, or ensure the wellbeing of those who cannot work – is a cost to capital that, systemically speaking, must be kept as low as possible. This insight has been the starting point for feminist analysis that begins with the unpaid work of cooking, cleaning and caring in the home, historically undertaken by women, in order to uncover the huge swathes of invisible work that the capitalist economy has long implicitly relied on. Moreover, when we look to key areas of care – healthcare, social care, education, childcare, domestic work and so forth – we can see how cost reduction, either in the pursuit of profit or in the context of austerity measures, is the driving force.

Since the 1970s, a crisis of care has been growing. While there has been a jump in the proportion of women working in paid employment outside of the home, there has

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been very little change to the sexual division of labour, and with that the expectation of whose role in society it is to care. At the same time, there has been significant wage stagnation, meaning that households now require two incomes to make ends meet. This means that more waged work must be done outside of the home, which takes away time from our ability to care or do housework. Added to this is austerity, a shrinking welfare state, and the rise of privatisation and the marketisation of care as an investment opportunity for capital. The consequence is a situation in which those who can afford to pay for commercial services do so, and those who cannot have to fit the work in themselves or go without. These developments have relied on the low-paid work of women of colour and migrant women in households and in the care sector to plug the gaps arising from greater female labour market participation, especially among the middle classes. All of this is underscored by a politics of personal responsibility for care as reflected in neoliberal social security practices seen, for example, in private pensions. Moreover, the crisis is exacerbated by the need for more care due to demographic changes, in particular an ageing population. In sum, societal resources for care are exhausted, while care needs are growing.

Currently, the personal and household services sector is the second-fastest growing sector in Europe, with demand expected to increase due to a combination of ageing and greater female labour market participation. A combination of public service retrenchment and time pressures are pushing people towards digital platform services that promise households a private and privatised form of crisis management when they lack time for care. In recent years there has been a proliferation of such digital platforms for domestic and care services. These platforms usually charge private households a subscription fee to connect with care workers offering childcare or eldercare services on

an hourly basis. Hired as independent contractors, care workers sign up to offer their services as part of a growing low-paid and precarious workforce in the gig economy.

Another example is the roll-out of digital health services in the NHS provided by private contracts. The service GP at Hand, first trialled in London, has been offering patients the option of registering with a digital service that gives them quick access to online GP consultations and ongoing use of an automated AI-driven symptom self-check app. Babylon Health, the private company providing the service, promised patients that they could avoid long waiting times for GP services and promised the NHS that it could save money, by increasing the occasions when users can self-manage their health without needing to see a doctor. The digital service has been particularly popular with a population that is young, affluent and relatively fit. Older people, those with more complex health needs, or those with caring responsibilities have been less likely to use it. Medical professionals repeatedly raised concerns that by taking the younger, healthier patients away from NHS GP practices and leaving those with more complex health needs behind, the company took away the resources GP practices needed to treat these patients. The concern is that the kind of business model introduced through the contracting of digital services like Babylon Health undermines both the principle and the material base of cross-generational collective solidarity that is fundamental to a public healthcare system.

A final example is the contracting out of social care services to the private sector by local authorities. The creation of a market for social care created investment opportunities for financial capital seeking high returns, including private equity. Much needed financial resources can be extracted from the care home sector by charging high administration, consultation and management fees; taking advantage of tax legislation for the purposes of avoiding corporation tax; loading high debt obligations and interest payments onto providers as a consequence of leveraged buyouts; and paying dividends to shareholders. In the case of residential care home chains, in 2019 the Centre for Health and the Public Interest estimated that that around 10% of funds 'leaked' out as rent, dividend payments, net interest payments, directors' fees, and profits before tax, amounting to an annual total of about £1.5bn.

This kind of financial wealth extraction happens off the back of the care home workers who are dealing with low pay and unacceptable working conditions. Repeatedly, the employment and working conditions for care workers are pitted against the fears of those who require care. This was evident in the proposed 2021 Health

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and Social Care Levy, which increased national insurance to fund health and social care. This was not accompanied by a fundamental reform of the way that care is funded, provided and regulated. Indeed, not much of the newly raised funds were to go to improving the situation for the workforce. Instead, the government's motivation seemed to be more orientated towards responding to voter concern over the cost of care in old age, and wealthier care recipients' fear of losing financial assets. The Health and Social Care Levy has since been reversed. However, to date there is still no substantive and sustainable solution to the social care crisis on the table.

In Britain, the responsibility for care has been increasingly off-loaded to private households or relegated to the privatised market. This has only served to entrench inequality and deepen divides, while also creating a system for profiting from care, with those who provide and receive care footing the bill. Addressing the care crisis will require a two-fold strategy based on principles of solidarity across generations.

First, we need a radical rethink of how our everyday lives are organised across generations and beyond the confines of the nuclear family. Right now, we are most likely to interact with one another across generations either in the workplace or within the family. What might friendship across generations look like? Can we dare to imagine what a society would look like that places care at its core? Experiments here would involve creating more collective infrastructures at the level of neighbourhoods for childcare as well as assistance and support for adults who require it. This is already happening where nursery schools and care homes are finding ways to interlink and interact so as to develop intergenerational models of care. More communal and intergenerational living arrangements, including new kinds of housing, would offer an alternative to the proliferation of individual, often very isolated, households. Designing new and more communal kinds of housing would also be a chance for more ecologically sustainable ways of living too.

Currently emerging ideas and initiatives for caring cities could also be an inspiration here. One first step could be to set up local 'care councils' to bring residents together – both as care workers, informal carers and as people with current or future care needs – to discuss their needs and collectively design ways to transform and improve local care infrastructures. As envisaged by remunicipalisation movements, this can also involve bringing privatised services back into public ownership to improve not only access, but pay and working conditions in the sector.

Second, we need radical reform of the ways in which solidarity is institutionally anchored through public services and mechanisms for wealth redistribution. Concretely, this means reforms towards universal basic services that include all aspects of care, funded by progressive taxation. And all in all, this means transforming societal care structures so that they no longer prop up private profit, but sustain both people and planet.

*Emma Dowling is a sociologist at the University of Vienna and author of the book *The Care Crisis – What Caused It and How Can We End It*.*

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## FURTHER READING

From Verso: *The Care Manifesto - The Politics of Interdependence* by the Care Collective (2020).

From Verso: *The Care Crisis - What Caused It and How Can We End It?* by Emma Dowling (2021).

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From Laura Gardiner Maja Gustafsson, Mike Brewer, Karl Handscomb, Kathleen Henehan, Lindsay Judge, and Fahmida Rahman: *An intergenerational audit for the UK* (2020). <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/intergenerational-audit-uk-2020/>

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