WHAT I LEARNED AT THE CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTER
20-YEARS-OLD WITH A POSITIVE PREGNANCY TEST AND
THIS IS WHAT THEY TOLD ME

BY YASTIKA GURU — PG6

The EMC Pregnancy Center at 344 E. 149th St. in the Bronx.
AUG/SEP

AUG 6-SEP 10 • FREE
STREET THEATRE: “TEACHER! TEACHER! OR PS I LOVE YOU”
Couched in satire, song and slapstick, educators teach against the background of the January 6th attempted coup, the desperate war in Ukraine, the constant threat of gun violence and the terrible mistakes of the Supreme Court. The musical also celebrates the joys of a good book report, the brilliance of a Mother’s Day poem, an eloquent essay blasting climate change, and the ultimate triumph of graduation. The production will be staged with an elaborate assemblage of trap doors, giant puppets, smoke machines, masks, original choreography and a screen providing continuous moving scenery behind the actors. Music will vary in style from Bossa Nova to Hip Hop to Musical Comedy to classical Cantata. Directed by Crystal Field. 75 min. In parks, playgrounds and closed-off streets throughout the five boroughs. Visit bit.ly/3z1rW16 for more info and show locations!

AUG 17 • 6PM-7PM
RALLY: RESISTANCE AND REPARATIONS
In the Spirit of Marcus Garvey! Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the first U.S. National Reparations Rally. Contact (718) 398-1766 or D12@AOL.com for more information.

AUG 20 • 7:30PM • FREE
MOBILE CINEMA: “LOOKING FOR THE WOLF”
More than 40 years after members of a revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean documentarian Kim Myeong makes a painstaking trip across Japan to find documentarist Kim Mirye makes a shi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo, Korean revolutionary cell blew up a Mitsubishihisshi headquarters in Tokyo. The bill also includes the Grammy-nominated Chilean tenor saxophonist Melissa Alindra, Bria Skonberg, a Canadian jazz trumpeter and bandleader. Music will vary in style from Bossa Nova to Hip Hop to Musical Comedy to classical Cantata. Directed by Crystal Field. 75 min. In parks, playgrounds and closed-off streets throughout the five boroughs. Tickets via ra.co/events/1567398. Get them while you can!

AUG 23 • 6PM-7:30PM • FREE
BOOK TALK: THE WITHDRAWAL WITH NOAM CHOMSKY AND VIJAY PRASHAD
Join The New Press and The People’s Foundation for the launch of Noam Chomsky and Vijay Prashad’s The Withdrawal: The war and imperialist. The book examines the end of the “American century,” and the horrifying interventions in Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan, as well as the engineering of a new security state with unprecedented powers of surveillance and detention. This event will be livestreamed and in-person. If coming to The People’s Foundation, please be prepared to show proof of vaccination and ID. Visit bit.ly/3vOrWMV to RSVP.

AUG 28 • 3PM–7PM • FREE
SUMMERSTAGE: UB40 BIGGA BAGGARDIM
UB40 have sold 100 million+ albums worldwide and have been named as one of the top 100 greatest album acts of all time by Rolling Stone. Alongside his colleague Robi Reed, Bigga Baggardim worked with UB40 to create the band’s latest: Bigga Baggariddim. Join MAXI PRIEST, & BIG MOUNTAIN band Big Mountain. Doors at 5; Show at 6:30.

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Join The New Press and The People’s Foundation for the launch of Noam Chomsky and Vijay Prashad’s The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan, as well as the Fragility of U.S. Power. Leading public intellectuals Chomsky and Prashad discuss the past 20 years of American imperialism, and their horrifying interventions in Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan, as well as the engineering of a new security state with unprecedented powers of surveillance and detention. This event will be livestreamed and in-person. If coming to The People’s Foundation, please be prepared to show proof of vaccination and ID. Visit bit.ly/3vOrWMV to RSVP.

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FORUM FOR THE LAUNCH OF NOAM CHOMSKY AND VIJAY PRASHAD
BOOK TALK: THE WITHDRAWAL WITH NOAM CHOMSKY AND VIJAY PRASHAD
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IN THIS ISSUE

SCHOOL DEFUNDER, P4
NYC school budgets remain in limbo as Mayor Adams wages a legal battle to preserve $469 million in education cuts.

MEDICAL MASQUEDE, P6
An inside look at how anti-abortion activists use misinformation and scare tactics to deter pregnant women seeking an abortion.

CYNICAL BARGAIN, P8
Republicans have used abortion to create a mass base for electing politicians who faithfully serve the 1%. Now they face a political reckoning.

AN ABORTION DOCTOR’S STORY, P9
“Abortion — like sex, and the pill and birth, and arthritis — is life,” says Dr. Melanie MacLennan.

ABORTION THROUGHOUT HISTORY, P10
Though many believe abortion to be a modern issue, the desire to control one’s reproductive choices has existed across millennia.

LATIN AMERICA’S GREEN WAVE, P12
Feminists in the U.S. have much to learn from the recent victories of abortion rights movements in Mexico, Columbia and Argentina.

RED STATE REPORT, P13
As calls for increasingly extreme anti-abortion laws grow in Idaho, so too does the resistance.

CUBA JOURNEY, P14
Two journalists look back on their recent visit to the Western Hemisphere’s only socialist nation.

SRI LANKA, P16
In July, Sri Lankan protesters savored the luxuries of the presidential palace after ousting their nation’s leader. Then the hard part began.

MONEY, P17
Bennett Baumer reviews three new books that have a lot to teach the left about how money and finance shapes the world.

THE PARALLAX VIEW, P19
A 1974 movie starring Warren Beatty has a lot to tell us today about conspiracy theories and why they attract so many people.

REVEREND BILLY, P19
The good reverend reflects on the latest images from the James Webb Telescope and our place in the universe.

A Daily Independent Global News Hour
with Amy Goodman and Juan González

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By Molly Morrow

Less than a month before New York City schools are scheduled to open, administrators still don’t know what their budgets will be. In June, the City Council passed an education budget for the 2023 school year that cut at least $215 million from 2022 levels. On July 18, two parents and two teachers sued to block the cuts, arguing that the budget approval was illegal because the city’s school board, the Panel for Education Policy (PEP), had not voted on it before the council did. On Aug. 3, State Supreme Court Judge Lyle Frank ordered the City Council to reconsider the 2023 education budget, but on Aug. 9, the city appealed the Aug. 5 ruling, reinstating the original budget cuts until the appeal is heard on Aug. 29.

City schools Chancellor David C. Banks got around the PEP voting requirement by issuing an “emergency declaration” on May 31. Laura D. Barbieri, a lawyer representing the four plaintiffs, argues that “no emergency justified the chancellor’s ignoring the proper procedure.”

Estimates of how much the education budget was cut vary widely. There are several sources of funding, and the biggest losses have come from those based on enrollment and attendance, which shrank during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayor Eric Adams’ office puts the figure at $215 million. City Comptroller Brad Lander has said it’s $469 million. Kaliris Salas-Ramirez, the Manhattan representative on the PEP, says the cuts amount to approximately $1.42 billion.

Judge Frank’s ruling used Comptroller Lander’s numbers: His order requires the city to restore $469 million to the education budget. If it fails to do that, the budget will revert to last year’s numbers. With Mayor Adams’ appeal, this requirement is on hold, and the budget has reverted to its original numbers.

The cuts provoked protests before the council approved the city budget June 13, and they have continued since then. Protesters at a town hall on public safety held by Mayor Adams in Harlem on July 11 were removed by security guards. Matt Gonzales says he was “dragged out of the room.”

“Our purpose in attending was to make clear that when talking about public safety, we need to talk about public education,” Gonzales, a policy analyst, says. “We wanted to confront Mayor Adams publicly, as he is the only person who can restore the budget.”

On July 13, 41 councilmembers, many of whom had voted to approve the budget, signed a letter asking the Adams administration to restore the education budget. Several attended a rally on the steps of Tweed Hall, the Department of Education’s Manhattan offices, on July 18.

The cuts forced many city schools to consider laying off staff and eliminating extracurricular activities and entire departments. P.S. 241 STEM Institute of Manhattan, a Harlem elementary school, is set to lose over $400,000. It already lacked a physical-education teacher and an assistant principal, and was prepared to lose arts and technology programs.

“There were a lot of tear-eyed students when I told them I wouldn’t be their teacher next year, and that they wouldn’t have a music program at all,” says Paul Trust, a music teacher at P.S. 39 in Park Slope who is one of the four plaintiffs in the suit. “Music is essential to what makes us human. To sever that, what do we become?”

“Schools are laying off arts teachers and music teachers, but those are precisely the way to reintegrate students back into school and cultivate a love of learning,” says Queens public-school teacher Amanda Vender.

Though activists initially celebrated the lawsuit win, reverting back to the initial budget until the appeal is heard means that, with school beginning on September 8, principals will likely have to make hiring and budgeting decisions without knowing which budget they will operate under, and many teachers will remain unsure if they’ll have a job.

AMBITION VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

This situation has led teacher and parent activists to question the city’s commitment to public education. More than just restoring the budget, they want far-reaching improvements to the public-education system. “I don’t just want to restore the cuts. I want to invest more,” says Kaliris Salas-Ramirez.

She says the city has the money to fund public education, in the form of leftover federal stimulus money, its current general reserves, and its $1.95 billion Rainy Day Fund. She says the city’s moves toward smaller class sizes, “something for everyone.”

One of the major reforms many teacher and parent activists support is smaller classes. In June, the state Legislature passed a bill requiring the city to limit class sizes to 20 students in kindergarten through third grade, 23 in grades 4–8, and 25 in high school. Governor Kathy Hochul, however, has not yet signed the bill, she has until Dec. 31.

Leonie Haimson, executive director of the nonprofit Class Size Matters, says the bill would provide “a huge opportunity for New York City children to be known by their teachers, and for their teachers to provide them the academic and emotional support they need.”

“I saw in the pandemic what a difference it made when we had 10 students in the classroom,” says Amanda Vender, who also has two children in city public schools. “You can meet students where they are and get to know them in a way you cannot otherwise.”

Salas-Ramirez, a medical professor at City University of New York whose field is behavioral development, says schools should be based on an “enrichment model” — such as “problem-based learning, hands-on learning” — rather than a testing-based model, and “this should be supported schoolwide, not just for the Gifted and Talented program.”

Aixa Rodriguez, an English Language Learner middle-school teacher in the Bronx, would roll back the city’s moves toward smaller schools. If smaller schools were consolidated into larger ones, she says, they would have the staff to provide a full suite of services and non-core classes, “something for everyone.”

Vender, an English as New a Language teacher, criticizes the lottery system, in which admission to many middle and high schools is based on random selection. She believes it increases segregation, because many children of immigrants are shut out if they move into their district after the lottery. She advocates the “controlled choice” system adopted by District 15 in Brooklyn, in which families rank which schools they want their children to attend, but an algorithm is used to make sure the schools reflect the district’s demographics.

Many activists argue that the Adams administration’s reluctance to restore the cuts is a sign of its intention to boost enrollment in charter schools, and believe that this is a major obstacle to achieving reform. Matt Gonzales describes Adams’ plan, like that of former mayor Michael Bloomberg, as privatization by sabotage: “starving public schools of resources, causing them to fail, and then replacing them with charter schools.” Salas-Ramirez believes that one tactic is to enroll a high number of students in charter schools, but move low-performing students to regular public schools immediately after the budget is finalized on Oct. 31; this leaves the charter schools highly funded, based on their September enrollments.

Applying political pressure to councilmembers paid off in gaining their commitment to restoring the cuts, says Jonathan Soto, a community organizer in the northeast Bronx, and should be continued when advocating future reform. “A few City Council members have said they would not vote to approve further cuts to education,” he says. “The protests were centered around getting these elected officials’ commitment to protecting education in the future.”
Ever since Texas seceded from Mexico in 1836 for pro-slavery reasons, the “Lone Star State” became a bulwark of reaction. By 1845, unable to withstand pressure from abolitionism at home and abroad, Texas entered the U.S. and quickly became the right-wing anchor of the nation. By 1861, Texas was in the vanguard of secession from the U.S. again because of pro-slavery mania. By June 19th, 1865 — Juneteenth — it required the dispatching of thousands of U.S. troops to compel enslavers in Galveston to retreat from slavery, well after the “Emancipation Proclamation” of 1863. (The rendering of “Juneteenth” in this book provides the most comprehensive account of what is today a new holiday.) Thereafter, Texas was a kingpin in imposing Jim Crow and lynchings and expropriating and liquidating Native Americans. Today, Texas threatens to be in the vanguard once again: this time in spearheading fascism. However, the lesson of this comprehensive analysis is that Repression breeds Resistance — yet one more reason why Texas could well become an anti-fascist leader nationally.
MEDICAL MASQUERADE
INSIDE NYC’S CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTERS

By Yastika Guru

EMC Pregnancy Center is a three minute walk from Third Avenue – 149th St. station, located in the “Hub” — a dense, commercially busy area in the South Bronx. While a crowd waits for the walk sign to cross the street, one man briefly struggles as his wheel pops out of his wheelchair. By the time I go to help him, he has expressionlessly jammed the wheel back in and hurried across the street. Everyone is in a rush. Few pay heed to the clusters of street vendors selling jewelry and sunglasses. The July heatwave is especially searing on the Bronx pavements.

Walking down the East 149th St. bustle, it’s hard to notice a little blue sign inviting pregnant people in.

The pregnancy center shares the building with a tattoo studio. When you enter, the walls are covered in loud calligraphy fonts and tattoo samples. Camouflaged by the designs of sample tattoo designs of roses with thorns, devil-angel sex and domino-natrixes, another blue sign reads, “FREE PREGNANCY TEST. NO APPT. NECESSARY. CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELING.”

EMC Pregnancy Center is a crisis pregnancy center.

A young woman in her 20s opens the door and introduces herself as Felix when I knock. After an eager welcome, a pregnancy test is administered. The Quick and Clear pregnancy test used by EMC is supplied by Heritage House “76, Inc., which claims to be “the largest supplier of Pro-Life, Pro-Abstinence, and Pro-Family materials for over 45 years.”

When two purple lines on the stick indicate pregnancy, Felix’s work truly begins. “For me to even get this job, I had to watch abortion videos. Very traumatizing,” she says, almost like we’re gossiping. “I do not recommend.”

Various claims are made at EMC Pregnancy Center. “The abortion could mess up your system. You might not be able to get pregnant again. It’s really painful and traumatizing,” Helix says. She hands me a pamphlet that reads, “Many women have been damaged for life as a result of their legal abortion.”

EMC does employ a licensed medical professional, a nurse and a trained ultrasound tech, Slattery told Brooklyn Paper in an interview, which he says proves his operation is not a “fake clinic.” Like many other crisis centers, Slattery intentionally sites his in close proximity to abortion clinics; the Downtown Brooklyn location is in the same building as a Planned Parenthood.

Over the years, a slew of lawsuits and fines have been filed against Slattery, most prominently by a succession of attorneys general of New York, including Letitia James in 2021.

Slattery, most prominently by a succession of attorneys general of New York, including Letitia James in 2021.

The openings and closures of crisis pregnancy centers are tracked nationally by risispregnancycentermap.com. In 2020, the site counted more than 2,500 centers across every state — at least three for each remaining abortion clinic. With the overturning of Roe, there have been countrywide reports of CPCs being overwhelmed by an influx of new patients with no other options. A rising percentage offer ultrasounds, even those who have expressed no interest in the procedure.

State attorneys general have mostly declined to go after CPCs that mislead women. Because most centers are not licensed as medical facilities, they are generally exempt from state and federal laws on patient privacy and medical ethics.

Here’s the catch — I was not and am not pregnant. Appearing to be pregnant is the only way to access these centers, so The Indypendent went undercover. A friend of a friend was pregnant, and luckily, the crisis centers’ employees don’t follow you into the bathroom when you’re extracting a urine sample from your handbag.

Even in New York state, where abortion was fully protected as a constitutional right in 2019, there are more “crisis” centers than actual abortion clinics. The EMC pregnancy center was founded in 1985 by Christopher Slattery, a former advertising executive who switched careers after talking a 15-year-old girl from Crown Heights out of getting an abortion. The group has run 20 clinics across the city over the years.

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State attorneys general have mostly declined to go after CPCs that mislead women. Because most centers are not licensed as medical facilities, they are generally exempt from state and federal laws on patient privacy and medical ethics.
IN ADDITION TO EMC PREGNANCY CENTER, I VISITED TWO OTHER CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTERS. ONE WAS AVAIL NYC, WHICH GOES OUT OF ITS WAY TO APPEAR NON-RELIGIOUS AND NON-POLITICAL. THEIR WEBSITE SAYS, “WE DECIDED TO DITCH THE LABELS OF POLITICAL RHETORIC AND ALL THE ASSOCIATIONS THEY CARRY. WE’RE COMMITTED TO CLIENT CARE. YOU HAVE OPTIONS, AND WE’RE HERE TO HELP YOU FIND ONE YOU FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT. NO POLITICS.” THEIR CENTER IS LOCATED A HALF-BLOCK AWAY FROM TIMES SQUARE ON W. 43RD ST.

THERE ARE COPY OF THE NEW YORKER AND NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IN AVAIL’S WAITING ROOM, ALONG WITH STASH TEA BAGS, A HOT-WATER Dispenser AND A BOWL OF HERSEY’S CANDY AND CHOCOLATE. THE FLOWERS ON THE TABLE ARE HOT PINK AND FAKE. WHEN MY TURN CAME, I WAS ESCORTED INTO ANOTHER ROOM WITH COMFORTABLE SOFAS AND CUSHIONS WHERE AN EMPLOYEE, CHELSEA, DISCUSSED MY OPTIONS. THE TRASH CAN IN THE ROOM HAD A POSITIVE PREGNANCY TEST IN IT, EVIDENCE OF THE ONE OTHER VISITOR BEFORE ME. CHELSEA SPOKE TO ME WITH FURROWED EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN AND EMPATHY AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND COUNSELLING, “IF PEOPLE ARE TURNED OFF FROM HAVING AN ABORTION, SHE URGED ME TO VISIT AGAIN.”

CHELSEA DESCRIBED HER PAST EXPERIENCES WITH POST-ABORTION EFFECTS OF AN ABORTION AND USES LANGUAGE SUCH AS “FORCE A BABY TO THE EARTH.”

DIFFERENT CPCs ENGAGE IN DIFFERENT DEGREES OF MISINFORMATION AND MISREPRESENTATION. FOR EXAMPLE, PREGNANCY HELP ON WEST 14TH ST. DOES NOT BLATANTLY LIE TO ITS VISITORS OR EXPLICITLY REJECT Abortions. INSTEAD, Abortions ARE DISCUSSED CYRERVALLY AND THE ONLY INFORMATION PROVIDED IS AN ANIMATED VIDEO THAT PORTRAITS VARIOUS ABORTION PROCEDURES IN GRAPHIC DETAIL.

THE DOOR TO PREGNANCY HELP IS INSIDE THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE. THE EMPLOYEE I INTERACTED WITH, NICOLE, WAS SWEET. SHE SITTED ON A CHAIR ACROSS THE TABLE FROM ME IN A ROOM WITH PINK FURNITURE AND A FIREPLACE. AFTER WE TALKED ABOUT MY SITUATION, SHE SAID WE WERE GOING TO WATCH A VIDEO ON ABORTION SO THAT I COULD MAKE A MORE INFORMED DECISION. SHE SET HER PHONE IN FRONT OF ME ON THE COFFEE TABLE AND WE WATCHED IT TOGETHER.

THE VIDEO CLAIMED THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO REVERSE THE EFFECTS OF AN ABORTION PILL AND USES LANGUAGE SUCH AS “FORCE THE DEAD BABY OUT OF THE WOMAN’S UTERUS.” I WAS DISTRESSED WHEN I HEARD THE FILM’S NARRATOR SAY, “THE WOMAN WILL OFTEN SIT ON A TOILET AS SHE PREPARES TO EXPEL THE CHILD, WHICH SHE WILL THEN Flush. SHE MAY EVEN SEE HER DEAD BABY. IF SHE LOOKS CAREFULLY, SHE MIGHT BE ABLE TO COUNT ITS FINGERS AND TOES.”

NICOLE EMPHASIZED REPEATEDLY THAT ABORTION IS “VERY SERIOUS,” NO MATTER HOW EASILY ACCESSIBLE IT IS IN NEW YORK CITY, AND NEEDS TO BE THOUGHT ABOUT VERY CAREFULLY. THIS WAS THE MAIN POINT DRIVEN HOME AT EVERY CENTER, REGARDLESS OF HOW EXPLICITLY ANTI-ABORTION THEY WERE.

AVAIL AND PREGNANCY HELP FOLLOWED UP ON ME VIA TEXT MESSAGE. CHELSEA FROM AVAIL MESSAGED ME REITERATING THAT THEY’RE HERE FOR ME, BUT WHEN I TOLD HER I WAS LEANING TOWARDS GETTING AN ABORTION, SHE URGED ME TO VISIT AGAIN AND SAID THAT THEY COULD OFFER “FINANCIAL RESOURCES” IF I WAS STRESSED ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE TO AFFORD RAISING A CHILD.

NICOLE FROM PREGNANCY HELP PERSISTENTLY TEXTED ME ABOUT WHAT I’D VISIT NEXT, HOW CONVERSATIONS WITH MY FAMILY WERE GOING AND THE NECESSITY OF GETTING AN ULTRASOUND — IT’S IMPORTANT TO THEM THAT YOU HEAR THE BABY’S HEARTBEAT.

WHILE I DIDN’T GIVE MY PHONE NUMBER TO EMC PREGNANCY CENTER, AND AS SUCH DID NOT EXPERIENCE ITS FOLLOW-UP PROCESS, EMC PROFESSED THE MOST BLUNTNESS.

“I’M NOT SURE HOW TO RESPOND. ARE YOU ABORTION MINDED?”

SIMILAR QUESTIONS HAVE CONTINUED TO LIGHT MY PHONE. WHEN I FINISHED WRITING THIS ARTICLE, ANOTHER NOTIFICATION FROM PREGNANCY HELP CHANGED.

“HI AGAIN JESSICA! JUST CHECKING IN. HOW ARE YOU DOING TODAY? CAN I CALL YOU?” GOES THE MESSAGE, WITH OMINOUS CHEERINESS. THIS IS THE SEVENTH MESSAGE I HAVE RECEIVED FROM PREGNANCY HELP IN THE TWO WEEKS SINCE I VISITED, DESPITE MY CLARIFICATION THAT I WAS LEANING TOWARDS AN ABORTION. I’M NOT SURE HOW TO RESPOND.
TIME FOR A RECKONING
THE REPUBLICANS’ UNHOLY ALLIANCE OF BIG MONEY AND RELIGIOUS ZEALOTS WILL BE PUT TO THE TEST THIS FALL

By John Tableton

On Aug. 8, Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts announced he was ending his push for a special session of the state legislature to pass new abortion restrictions. He didn’t have the votes. It is too saddening that only 30 Nebraska state senators are willing to come back to Lincoln this fall in order to protect innocent life,” Ricketts said in the announcement.

The Cornhusker State is a Republican bastion that Donald Trump won by 19 points in 2020. So what happened? Kansas happened.

On Aug. 2, Kansas voters rejected an anti-choice ballot initiative by a margin of 59-41 — in a state Trump won by 15 points. The measure would have repealed the right to an abortion guaranteed in the Kansas state constitution and empowered the state legislature to pass an abortion ban. The ballot initiative was crushed by overwhelming turnout in Kansas City’s affluent suburbs. It also underperformed in the deeply conservative western parts of the state. Six weeks after the Supreme Court issued its ruling in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, Kansans had glimpsed the dystopian realities of a post-Roe world — a 10-year-old rape victim in Ohio forced to cross state lines to receive an abortion, pregnant realities of a post-Roe world — a 10-year-old rape victim in Ohio forced to cross state lines to receive an abortion, pregnant realities of a post-Roe world — a 10-year-old rape victim in Ohio forced to cross state lines to receive an abortion, pregnant realities of a post-Roe world — a 10-year-old rape victim in Ohio forced to cross state lines to receive an abortion, pregnant realities of a post-Roe world — a 10-year-old rape victim in Ohio forced to cross state lines to receive an abortion.

In the late 1970s, the Republican Party was hungry to overturn the New Deal order which, over the previous 40 years, had ushered in the most egalitarian period in U.S. history. This era had been marked by high taxes on the rich, a thriving (though mostly white) middle class, the advent of at least a rudimentary social welfare state and tighter regulation of big business, especially Wall Street.

This arrangement had been too politically potent for conservatives to defeat. However, surging inflation, resentment over the humiliating end to the Vietnam War and, crucially, a backlash against the cultural upheavals of the 1960s and early 1970s offered them an opening.

Protestorynoes, anti-family feminists and promiscuous gays played to the fears and resentments stirred by historic advances in the rights of racial minorities, women and LGBTQ people. The culture war was on. However, no issue would prove to be of more enduring value for driving social conservatives into the arms of the Republican Party than abortion.

What had once been an obsession of the Catholic Church was turned into a mass movement by conservative evangelical leaders such as the Moral Majority’s Jerry Falwell. Where evangelicals had once take a passive attitude toward the “fallen world” of politics and shown little interest in abortion, they were now inflamed by the desire to “save the unborn” and, more broadly, roll back the social transformations of the 1960s. In 1967, California Gov. Ronald Reagan had signed one of the most liberal pro-choice laws of that era. By the time Reagan ran for president in 1980 he was fully on board with the “pro-life” movement. “Pro-lifers” delivered their votes by the millions, and he delivered huge tax cuts for the rich, slashed government regulations on businesses and opened the door to devastating attacks on labor unions. That lopsided bargain has continued for decades, with country club Republicans reaping the benefits while offering rhetorical support for a movement many of them privately disdain.

In 2016, Donald Trump needed to reassure the hesitant, self-styled “values voters” in the Republican Party that he was worth their vote. Famous for being a Manhattan playboy, Trump had shown no interest in abortion during his decades of public life. But selling out women and other menstruating people to advance his own prospects was an easy choice for The Donald. He made Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, a fierce abortion foe, his running mate and released a pair of lists composed of 21 anti-choice individuals that he would draw from when nominating Supreme Court justices. Among those on Trump’s lists were Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh.

As for the Democrats, they have trumpeted their support for Roe for decades, but have done little to act on it. The past four Democratic presidents have had Democratic congressional majorities during their time in office but never codified Roe into law. When pressed on his inaction in 2009, President Barack Obama stated that fighting for abortion rights was not his “highest legislative priority” or, as it turned out, any priority at all.

That laggary has continued to the present. When Dobbs was announced on June 24, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi read a poem and sent out a tacky fundraising email. Pelosi’s top lieutenant Jim Clyburn (D-SC) called the ruling “anticlimactic,” while the Biden administration was silent for days about how it would respond before being shamed by activists into speaking out.

In the aftermath of the Kansas referendum, the Democrats have begun pouring tens of millions of dollars into campaign ads defining Republican candidates as anti-abortion extremists. They have plenty of material to work with. These efforts will likely succeed in many races. If history is a guide, keeping Democrats to their pro-choice promises — such as carving out an exception to the Senate filibuster to pass a law codifying Roe v. Wade — will be a whole other task.

The egg released each month from an ovary is 100 million, which is about the diameter. Abortion rights opponents believe that the moment the egg is penetrated by a sperm cell, a new human being with a soul has been created, with rights equal to other humans and in many ways superior to those of its host. To end the new created person’s existence is thus tantamount to murder and must always be opposed.

This is religious dogma. In the real world, the cruelty it requires to be fully enforced is unsustainable. If exceptions are granted, the whole ideological construct of the “pro-life” movement unravels. It took a viciously misogynistic Supreme Court ruling to make this clear. Republican candidates now find themselves in an untenable position: Defy the wishes of millions of their most implacable supporters? Or defy a clear majority of Americans on an issue that can no longer be overlooked?

May this moment mark the unraveling of the unholy alliance between big money and religious zealots that has fueled an increasingly extreme Republican Party for the past 40 years. And out of this debacle may we also see a new politics emerge that recognizes the humanity of all people.

Amen.
ABORTION DOCTOR’S STORY

By Melanie MacLennan

A

bortion — like sex, and the pill and birth, and arthritis — is life.

My first abortion was in 1992, in my third year of medical school. I was seeing a remarkable therapist who put me in touch with a woman in Harlem who was part of a self-help group of women practicing menstrual extraction (a form of abortion that came about just before the Roe decision). Abortion was legal at the time but I wasn’t fond of the idea of going to the hospital for one and I liked the idea of women helping women. It took me a while to decide what to do, so I was about eight weeks along by the time we did the extraction at my apartment in the East Village. A couple of women came. One was a nurse; the rest were lay people who had all been practicing on each other — which was what self-help menstrual extraction groups did. They regularly got together several times a month, examined their own and each others’ cervixes and vaginas, noted the part of the cycle they were in, extracted menses only or perhaps it was also a very early pregnancy (less than two weeks or so).

There are a lot of doctors and do-it-yourself-it’s possible sorts of people in my family, so I liked this idea. My aunt drove ambulances for the socialists in England during WWII. My uncle was a doctor who did reconstructive cancer surgery in the outback of Australia. I had the pill years before I needed it because some of my friends found a doctor who would give it to us. They, all a few years older, took the risk of taking me around with them, and I went to all the marches and protests — sometimes out of state — antiwar, Earth Day and the burgeoning women’s movement.

I had my second abortion a year after the first, when I was interning in eastern North Carolina. My unintended pregnancy was causing me to fall asleep standing up while talking to the attending physicians. Finally, I had an emergency room patient who told me about the abortion clinic she had just been to. I made an appointment and made the four-hour drive each way.

After these experiences, I wanted to learn how to do an abortion. In residency in North Carolina, I learned about a doctor who was willing to teach me. Richard Manning, is on the hit list of abortion doctors. He was a part of a group of OB/GYNs in Knoxville. He traveled six days a week throughout the South and did abortions from Knoxville to Asheville to Charlotte to Charleston, and then Arkansas and Mississippi and then back home to Knoxville. He’s in his 70s now and still doing abortions.

Dr. Manning was willing to teach me — a non OB. I went every Saturday that I wasn’t on call. There is no “certification” for abortion competency. He decided that I was to watch 50 he did and then I did 50 with him behind me and then he turned me loose! Fifty abortions is more than any OB/GYN resident has usually done after four years of residency.

Right before I graduated, Dr. Manning had a heart attack; he asked me to cover for him for a couple of months. I covered for him in Charleston and Charlotte and Asheville. When Dr. Manning returned, I officially became part of the schedule and ended up doing abortions with him for 12 years.

One of the first abortions I did was with a 15-year-old girl in Charlotte. One of the techs called me and said, “I can’t find the pregnancy.” Her blood pressure was very high — something like 200 over 100. I plunked the ultrasound on her belly and saw that there was a full-term infant, ready to be delivered. We called the ambulance right away.

She didn’t know how pregnant she was nor did she want to know. She’d been wearing a loose basketball shirt and had been playing basketball the whole time. She was raped by a family member.

I once did a nine-week abortion on a young woman who was very nervous. The woman who owned the clinic later told me that this woman was an anti-abortion protester, that she’d protested at the clinic. She also told me this woman had thrown herself down the stairs and swam into a cold pond.

In 2008, after 12 years, I stopped doing abortions. I’d been with the same group for over a decade and wanted a change. I moved back to New York, where abortion malpractice insurance is very expensive and I couldn’t afford it. But I didn’t think I was done performing abortions.

For the past decade or so, I’ve been doing addiction medicine, working mostly with homeless people and other marginalized populations in shelters, safe havens and now a public hospital. I didn’t plan out a medical career for myself. I just thought that if I loved what I did, I would make enough money. Unfortunately, those days ended shortly after my medical school graduation with the advent of privatized insurance.

Since the overturning of Roe, people have reached out to me asking if I’d be willing to do abortions again. At the hospital where I’m working, a surgeon and an OB/GYN have inquired about my experience and what I’m capable of doing. I’m also a member of various doctors groups, mostly family practice who do reproductive health and abortions and other reproductive health organizations. There are many ways to help — many doctors are stretched very thin doing abortions in the states they are licensed in, others are helping train people to do them. There are funds to help support medical providers such as Dr. Canin Bernard in Indiana who did an abortion on a 10-year-old rape victim and has been targeted with death threats by “pro-life” zealots. One thing I am doing is mentoring medical students that are interested in reproductive health.

You can’t even see that it’s an embryo until you hit 10 weeks. Before that, it’s a tablespoon to two tablespoons of different colored tissues. The easiest way to do an at-home abortion is by taking a pill, but now states are regulating against that, too — and to such an extent that miscarriages are now potential crime scenes and the doctor and patient could end up in jail even if the pill is mailed to them.

Right now, communities are organizing to provide abortions for people in need who live in the near-majority of states where it is now illegal — with travel routes, medication abortion by mail where legal, etc. There are a lot of people who are organizing around this right now, and you should simply find them and hook up with them if you’re interested. There’s power in numbers. There is also continued interest in the long history of contraception and abortion that is sometimes, in some places, still shared knowledge — and one can go out into their garden to pick their contraception and put it in their salad!

As told to Amba Guerguerian.
ABORTION: THROUGHOUT HISTORY

By Molly Morrow

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ough many believe abortion to be a modern issue set in motion by the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, the desire to control one’s reproductive choices, and often to terminate pregnancies, has existed across millennia. During that time legal abortion was the distinction between formed and unformed bodies, protected from its earliest embryonic stage because the fetus’ soul became rational when the fetus obtained a human soul. In Aristotle’s Politics, said that the fetus’ soul became rational about 3 months for a female embryo, up to 40 days for a male embryo. Aristotle’s theory of sonnicity, which concerns the possibility of what something may become, has been interpreted by Catholic moral philosophers to support the idea that a fetus should be protected from its earliest embryonic stage because it will later develop into a full person. A similar argument is later used in the Roe v. Wade decision, saying that at the point of viability, the fetus’ potential reality must be protected.

ANCIENT GREECE

The Pelagian ban on human life began at the moment of conception, and the Hippocratic oath spoke against abortion out of fear of injury to the woman undergoing one. However Plato and Aristotle both supported abortion as a means of population control. Aristotle believed abortion was permissible up to 40 days for a male embryo and up to three months for a female embryo, based on what he believed to be developmental differences around when the fetus formed a human soul. In Politics, he argued that the loss between useful and unuseful souls should be the fetus’ development of sensation. However, Aristotle’s theory of sonnicity, which concerns the possibility of what something may become, has been interpreted by Catholic moral philosophers to support the idea that a fetus should be protected from its earliest embryonic stage because it will later develop into a full person. A similar argument is later used in the Roe v. Wade decision, saying that at the point of viability, the fetus’ potential reality must be protected.

ANCIENT INDIA

In the United States from approximately 1840 to 1880, abortion was socially constructed as an issue for evangelicals when conservative politicians and lawmakers are attempting to develop interventions and legislation that will protect women’s rights to abortions.

ANCIENT INDIA

Though many believe abortion to be a modern issue set in motion by the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, the desire to control one’s reproductive choices, and often to terminate pregnancies, has existed across millennia. During that time legal abortion was the distinction between formed and unformed bodies, protected from its earliest embryonic stage because the fetus’ soul became rational when the fetus obtained a human soul. In Aristotle’s Politics, said that the fetus’ soul became rational about 3 months for a female embryo, up to 40 days for a male embryo. Aristotle’s theory of sonnicity, which concerns the possibility of what something may become, has been interpreted by Catholic moral philosophers to support the idea that a fetus should be protected from its earliest embryonic stage because it will later develop into a full person. A similar argument is later used in the Roe v. Wade decision, saying that at the point of viability, the fetus’ potential reality must be protected.
GREEN TIDE RISING IN LATIN AMERICA
U.S. HAS MUCH TO LEARN FROM NEW FEMINIST MOVEMENTS THAT SPURRED ARGENTINA, COLOMBIA AND MEXICO TO DUMP TRADITIONAL ABORTION LAWS

By Laura Carlsen

Latín Americans looked on in shock as the Trump-loaded U.S. Supreme Court in June stripped women of a basic right that they had taken for granted for decades. Since 1973, women in the United States could choose to terminate a pregnancy, while in Latin American countries, women suffered clandestine abortions and imprisonment for deciding if and when to enter motherhood. Now powerful women’s movements in Mexico, Argentina and Colombia have won access to the right to choose, just as women in half the U.S. states are on the verge of losing it.

Mexico’s Supreme Court unanimously declared it unconstitutional to penalize abortion on Sept. 7, 2021. The decision, centered on a woman’s autonomy, affirmed that criminalization violates the sexual, reproductive and human rights of women and discriminates against “women and persons with the capacity to become pregnant.” Tens of thousands of Mexican women poured into the streets to celebrate the decision.

“It is really fundamental in concrete terms that in this country no woman can be imprisoned unjustly for exercising her right to choose,” Karla Michael Salas, a Mexican feminist lawyer-activist, told me.

THE GREEN TIDE

Mexico’s victory was the result of decades of feminist grassroots organizing and strategic litigation. It also received a gust of wind in its sails from the Argentine women’s victory in December 2020, when congress passed a law allowing abortion during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. What became known as “the green tide” — after the green bandanas worn by women in Argentina to symbolize life — fueled movements throughout the hemisphere.

The green tide and previous movements broke down social taboos against talking about abortion and mobilized people to defend their rights. The change at the community level happened silently, as a reality that had been kept hidden by associations of sin and personal shame was placed in the public sphere.

Women in Mexico first had to build a movement that worked on three main fronts: pressuring the state to guarantee the right to abortion as the domain of a woman’s choice; educating and galvanizing public opinion in favor of women’s rights; and creating networks to accompany women having abortions and imprisoned for deciding if and when to enter motherhood. The change at the community level was key to the colonial conquests and now to imperialist efforts to exploit scarce natural resources through extractive industries such as mining, oil and gas exploitation, monocropping and hydroelectric plants. As women lead the efforts against these projects being imposed on their lands, unwanted pregnancies and criminalization of their sexuality force them to retreat from the public sphere and severely affect their mental health. Powerful economic interests benefit from women’s confinement to domestic labs, and many of those interests emanate from the United States.

Christian fundamentalism has played a role in the rise of reactionary movements in both the United States and Latin America. In recent Latin American elections, far-right candidates that explicitly anti-woman platforms supported by religious fundamentalists have gained power as their numbers rise. Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, elected in 2018 in large part because of the support of fundamentalist groups, tweeted after the Argentine legalization, “If it depends on me and my administration, abortion will never be approved on our soil.”

Experts warn that the Supreme Court ruling could fuel a backlash in Latin America and the rest of the world. Right-wing anti-abortion organizations are tightly linked and internationally funded. Many have set up “crisis pregnancy centers” throughout Latin America that offer disinformation to frightened young women facing an unwanted pregnancy. They lobby against all efforts to respect women’s rights over their own bodies. Abortion-rights organizations warn that the ruling could increase funding to these groups, and have documented that most opposition to abortion rights in Latin American countries is driven by organizations from outside the country. This encouragement of fundamentalists will also increase harassment and persecution of abortion seekers and providers.

The Supreme Court ruling is also likely to interfere with U.S. organizations abroad working for sexual and reproductive rights. The 1973 Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act has long prohibited federal funds being used for abortions abroad. The “Mexico City Policy,” initiated by President Ronald Reagan in 1984, banned U.S. foreign aid from going to any non-governmental organization that provides abortion-related services. The policy was rescinded by Bill Clinton, reinstated by George W. Bush, rescinded by Barack Obama, reinstated and strengthened by Donald Trump, and rescinded again by Joseph Biden. This Democrat-Republican ping-pong game has wreaked havoc with women’s health abroad and points to the need for structural guarantees for women’s basic rights.

A NEW ERA OF FEMINIST SOLIDARITY

As a new phase of struggle begins in the United States, a new phase of solidarity has also begun. Feminist organizations in Mexico are working intensely with organizations in the United States to create networks to accompany women having medication abortions, using knowledge and experience they developed during decades of protest. The World Health Organization has long recommended medication abortion as a safe and effective method of terminating pregnancy.

“Because abortion had been restricted for so many years in Mexico, there came a moment when in the movement we had to go the other way — not betting exclusively on legislation, not just relying on the courts or that access to health services be guaranteed,” explains Verónica Cruz, a pioneer in the formation of these networks in Guanajuato, one of the most conservative states in the country. “In addition to that, we began to work on the social decriminalization of abortion, woman by woman, guaranteeing every woman who needs it her right to abortion with social accompaniment. That has made a difference in Mexico and throughout Latin America, and I believe that today the United States has the opportunity to learn from this experience, to learn from the South again.”

The lessons from Mexico and Latin America are that grassroots mobilization works to change laws that deny women’s rights, but also that women cannot depend entirely on the patriarchal state to guarantee their rights — even though that is supposed to be the state’s job. Autonomous women’s organizations in Mexico made huge strides under cover in access to abortion, contributing to countless women’s mental and physical well-being and empowering women to choose when and if they want to become pregnant. Tens of thousands of Mexican women voted for Jocelyn Ordaz Jimenez, a candidate backed by the feminist movement, as governor in their state.

The bravery and perseverance of women activists enabled
cal health, and also preparing the ground for legalization. This is not to say that legalization is not necessary. All women need the right to have medical backup and to talk to professionals about their decision to terminate a pregnancy. Most of all, they need the assurance that they will not be prosecuted. However, in Latin America, we have learned how to organize and how to access this right with and without the blessings of the state. The issue here is not whether to “permit” a medical procedure, it is how far the state should be allowed to intervene in women’s personal lives. Mexico’s decision is perhaps the clearest yet to legally and constitutionally locate the decision in the realm of women’s life choices, with no legal grounds for the state to dictate one way or the other.

This is a dangerous moment for women’s rights in the Americas. But women’s movements have perhaps never been stronger in Latin America. In Chile, feminists mobilized nearly 2 million people on International Women’s Day in 2020 and have achieved the inclusion of women’s rights, including the right to abortion, in the proposed constitution. Mexico’s “3M” demonstrations on the same day gathered hundreds of thousands of marchers around the country. In many countries, feminist and women’s movements are the strongest autonomous grass-roots movements, challenging right-wing and supposedly progressive governments alike.

Even a chill factor from the United States will not turn back the green tide. Now the challenge is to make it global, to recognize how much strengthening or weakening restrictions on the rights of women in one country can affect their rights in another. If we can leverage the lessons learned, the organizing methods and the analysis of the threats we face, we can move forward together.

Laura Carlsen is coordinator of Global Learning and Solidarity with Just Associates (JASS). A dual Mexican-U.S. citizen, she lives in Mexico City and writes on U.S.-Latin America relations.

**Human Rights Victory:**

Women in Colombia celebrate after the country’s Constitutional Court legalized abortion earlier this year.

**Against Dystopia**

**In Post-Roe Idaho, Pro-Choicers Make a Stand**

By Erin Sheridan

In Idaho, the Supreme Court’s June 24 decision allowing states to outlaw abortion set off a “trigger law” that will make abortion a felony when it goes into effect Aug. 25, unless the Idaho Supreme Court rules otherwise.

Passed in 2020, the law was designed to go into effect if the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade. It sets a two-year minimum prison sentence for medical professionals who perform an abortion. The only exceptions are to save the life of a pregnant woman and in cases of rape or incest — but only if the crime was reported to police and the patient gives the doctor a copy of that report.

Two other bills passed in 2021 would bar all abortions after six weeks of pregnancy — before most women are able to confirm they’re pregnant — and allow family members of a woman who’s had an abortion to sue the medical providers who performed it. Planned Parenthood is challenging all three of these laws in state courts. During an Aug. 3 hearing, justices questioned conflicting language in the three laws. The court is expected to issue a ruling on whether those bans go into effect at the end of August.

Things could get worse. Politicians espousing white Christian nationalist views have won an increasing number of elected offices in Idaho. The highest ranking is Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin, who was a featured speaker at the white-nationalist America First Political Action Conference in February, though affected offices range from school board positions to county commissionerships to state legislators.

The Idaho Family Policy Institute, the Christian-right group that pushed the six-week abortion ban, has lobbied for more extreme legislation. Some legislators have floated ideas like banning emergency contraception and IUDs, eliminating the exceptions for rape or incest, and penalizing individuals and businesses who attempt to pay for a pregnant woman to have an abortion out of state.

That last proposal would be significant because abortion is legal in Oregon and Washington, the two states on Idaho’s western border. Planned Parenthood, which operates the only current abortion clinic in eastern Oregon, has opened a clinic in Ontario, Ore., a border town of 11,000 people where many Idahoans already go to buy legal cannabis. It’s about an hour from Boise. The Guttmacher Institute estimates that the number of Idahoans seeking abortions in Washington will more than quadruple.

Even before the Supreme Court ruling, there were only three known abortion providers in the Boise area: one private obstetrician/gynecologist and two Planned Parenthood clinics, one in Boise (which closed at the end of May) and one in the adjacent city of Meridian. Planned Parenthood has another clinic in Twin Falls that provides the abortion pill through 11 weeks. Idaho previously enacted numerous restrictions on abortion.

A 2008 law requires women seeing abortions to receive state-directed counseling designed to discourage them from having one and then wait 24 hours, and girls under 18 must have consent from a parent unless they can persuade a judge to let them bypass that. The state also has numerous regulations that use the pretext of safety to create obstacles to abortion, such as requiring all second-trimester abortions to be performed in a hospital.

I am new to Idaho, and I was born over two decades after the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision held that state laws against abortion were unconstitutional. I did not grow up hearing the horrific stories about women having to choose between harming their bodies and risking their lives in back-alley abortions or carrying their rapists’ babies to term or giving up talent and careers to raise children against their will. I’ve always had a certain amount of freedom of movement, the expectation that my body is my own, and that I can pursue whatever I set my mind to.

Idaho became notorious as a haven for white supremacists when the Aryan Nations had a compound outside Coeur D’Alene in the 1990s. That element of extremism still exists here and is growing rapidly with an influx of out-of-state money and right-wingers leaving liberal cities for Idaho’s increasingly extremist politics.

But since Justice Samuel Alito’s draft opinion was leaked in May, I have seen people across Idaho rally for abortion rights in ways I have not seen since moving here in 2021. In May, an estimated 5,000 people rallied outside the statehouse in Boise, forming an ocean of demonstrators in the city’s downtown. State Rep. Lauren Necochea (D-Boise) recalled her great-grandmother dying at St. Luke’s Hospital in Boise after trying to abort a pregnancy during her abusive second marriage.

“You can pry my IUD out of my cold, dead uterus,” Rep. Necochea told the crowd.
HAVANA—One evening I looked out my window at the treetops in the lush courtyard below. A middle-aged woman and man tried to pick one of the few ripe fruits in their towering mango tree. One of them used a long pole with a hook at the end while the other guided them. The spotter’s perspective wasn’t very good and they gave up after failing to snag a fruit. I had the perfect vantage point and I should have called out. They would have welcomed the help. I didn’t want to bother strangers. In hindsight I felt guilty. In Cuba, holding back something that could help others feels like a sin.

Life in Cuba is the inverse of the United States in many ways. Resources are scarce but spread relatively evenly among the country’s 11 million people; in the U.S., a wealthy minority enjoys lives of great luxury while tens of millions of people are one misfortune from financial and social ruin. In Cuba, there is only one political party and its representatives in parliament choose the president, but the people get to vote on national referendums. In the U.S., the people choose their leaders, but don’t get to vote on any specific laws or changes. In Cuba, pimps are prosecuted more than sex workers; in the U.S., sex workers are still the ones targeted for arrest and punishment more than pimps. “In the United States, people give when they have something extra; In Cuba, you give what you have,” said Carmen, one of our group leaders.

One afternoon, I was sitting in the little plaza in front of the community center where our group stayed. When a man with one arm in a brace and a lopsided gait walked by pushing a wooden cart that couldn’t make it over one of the uneven cobblestones. He helped him lift the cart and upon returning to my bench, a man who had been facing away, standing on the edge of the square under the shade of a tree and smoking a cigarette, turned to me and said, Disculpa, no lo vi, “I’m sorry, I didn’t see him.” As if it were everyone’s duty to help the man with the cart. When the cart—pusher stalled again, another man walked up and helped him across the street. (My face got hot with anger as I thought of NYC — a homeless man my boyfriend once knew spoke of angry people who beat on him and his friends, spit on them and set them on fire.)

Cuban solidarity runs strong. People greet you with open arms. I’ve never heard the phrase “you’re family” more in such a short period. Once, I was crying against the wall of a house and a woman came out and gave me a hug. Another time, I walked into a neighborhood library and the librarian greeted me with such warmth and generosity of knowledge that I was overwhelmed (in a good way). She teased up when it was time to say goodbye.

Despite the deprivation people experience, crime is sparse. I have traveled widely and Havana is the only city I’ve been to where, as a woman, going out alone at night didn’t feel threatening.

During our delegation’s visit, there was a gas leak at a hotel in Old Havana that was closed for repairs. Forty-three workers (including a couple of their children) died. The country went into three days of national mourning and people were glued to the news as the body count grew. Some clubs and bars hosted musical performances, but most didn’t. We went to one that refrained. The energy was somber and desired, but that’s all.

If the best way to judge a country is by its people, Cubans know what’s up. Not us. Amid their shared hardships, they have a different kind of relationship to each other that holds up a mirror to our own dehumanization.

When I returned to “the land of the free” in mid-May, I powered on my phone and read Justice Samuel Alito’s draft opinion overturning Roe v. Wade. The right to choose was soon to be lost. In front of me, huge, armed customs officials created a menacing presence. One of them plucked a Middle Eastern woman out of the line and literally asked her if she speaks Arabic. Then they escorted her away. I also noticed after returning that so many people feel sullen and angry here — sometimes it feels like everyone’s about to explode. I felt much more freedom to be human in Cuba. I could be my true boisterous, emotional self with strangers. I remembered something my Cuban Studies professor once told me. “In Cuba, they say, ‘Americans have the freedom to buy what they want, but their minds are caged. In Cuba, we only live with the bare minimum, but our minds are free.’”

In the midst of public health and climate crises, now seems like a good time to take a few pointers from Cuba. In Latin American School of Medicine has provided free training in community-based medicine to tens of thousands of doctors from poor countries around the world. The government gives out cigarettes to its people and Cuban doctors have created a vaccine for lung cancer. It has also become a global leader in organic agriculture since the fall of the Soviet Union it access to imported farm machinery, agricultural projects that damage the environment are prohibited.

“Every Cuban is a gardener, even in Havana,” said Yamila Perez, a scientist at the Ministry of Agriculture.

No one starves in Cuba, but given the need for mandatory rationing of basic food staples, few grow fat either. Gardens dot the capital city’s rooftops and patios. Cubans are encouraged to save seeds and plant anywhere they can. The Ministry of Agriculture tells people to just go up to any unused plot of land and start farming it. In the States, there’s a term for that, guerilla gardening, because it is illegal!

And when it comes to a woman’s right to determine if and when she will have a child, reproductive rights are championed. You can go to a pharmacy and buy the morning-after pill over the counter. Abortion has been legal since 1961 and is fully accessible up to 10 weeks; later-term abortions are available but require an evaluation.

“Cuba has problems, but the whole world has problems,” said one man I spoke with on the Malecón, the popular esplanade that stretches along Havana’s shoreline. It’s hard to distinguish which problems are or are not caused by the U.S. embargo. But, corruption does exist though it’s more of the kind that accompanies scarcity. For example, a Cuban friend named Rodolfo complained to me about how his brother, as a retired military officer, gets to rent a room out at one of the most desirable beaches at a very low cost.

Rodolfo would later tell me that his cousin and aunt moved to the States and made it: They have a three-story house overlooking the Hudson. But during COVID, the cousin confessed that he wished he never left Cuba. Rodolfo then frustratedly remembered that when he was visiting that cousin, he would say “hello” or wave to people as they passed by his family’s porch in New Jersey and that very few neighbors gestured back.

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If the best way to judge a country is by its people, Cubans know what’s up. Not us. Amid their shared hardships, they have a different kind of relationship to each other that holds up a mirror to our own dehumanization.
REFLECTIONS FROM TWO JOURNALISTS WHO JOINED AN INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION TO THE ISLAND IN MAY

RESISTING THE BLOCKADE, 60 YEARS LATER

By Julia Thomas

HAVANA—In the half-dark of morning on May 1, the city’s wide boulevards were empty of cars and filled with the sound of footsteps. People were advancing in loosely gathered groups toward the Plaza de la Revolución, the site of mass assemblies and monumental speeches over Cuba’s past 60 years. By sunrise, hundreds of thousands were gathered to celebrate International Workers Day.

The May Day march has been an annual tradition in Cuba for decades but was canceled for the past two years due to COVID-19. This year marked the first time since the pandemic began that Cubans had gathered together in such large numbers. Shockingly and in stark contrast to U.S. events attended by the president, there was little security presence; we were standing very close to President Miguel Diaz-Canel.

Looking out on the crowds of workers of all sectors (who were wearing masks, as required by the Cuban government) as they celebrated Cuba’s victories in education, healthcare and vaccine development was surreal at moments and incredibly moving. Placards bore slogans like “Cuba Vive,” and banners and flags waved against the backdrop of Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos’ faces etched on buildings neighboring the plaza. Some march participants carried children on their shoulders; others danced as they walked, moving forward in masse through the heart of Havana.

The Cuban people have lived under more than six decades of economic sanctions by the United States, the impact of which has become increasingly severe during the pandemic; Cubans have faced severe shortages of food and basic necessities, and limited accessibility to medicine has created widespread challenges. On this day of celebration, however, people celebrated the triumphs of Cuba’s socialism and protections for workers.

“We have problems as Cubans, not as workers,” one woman said. “I walked in the parade like everyone,” said another man. “I just see it as a festival. It was nice to have it after not having it last year. Some people bring their kids and really enjoy it. Others don’t have as much pride.”

“May Day is a celebration, a party,” numerous Cubans reiterated when I asked them about what the day meant to them. And yet, the day itself was also an affirmation of the living dream of the Cuban revolution, and the struggle inherent to maintaining a socialist society in a capitalist world. The reality of living under U.S. sanctions is exhausting and disruptive to Cuban people’s lives.

During my nine days in Cuba as a delegate with the Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective, I heard Cubans from many walks of life speak about the impact of the U.S. blockade which not only makes normal trade between the U.S. and Cuba impossible but also denies access to the U.S. market to any foreign company that does business with Cuba.

“The blockade shakes my foundations,” said Saulo Serrano, a campesino artist and unionist who paints the Cuban countryside and its scenery through a revolutionary lens, depicting farmers, birds, fish, roosters, in varied colors and styles. The blockade, says Serrano, affects his artistic practice down to where he gets his paper, paints and materials.

Other Cubans even responded with a sense of resignation, as if speaking of white noise, a reality that is sadly synonymous with life. For them, a change in the status quo is urgently needed. Instead of advertisements, revolutionary slogans decorate the sides of buildings, bridges and billboards.

One moment that continues to stick with me is a walk through a Cuban community clinic. On the wall of her office, Dr. Barbara Romero pointed out a hand drawn map of the neighborhood she’s served for roughly 40 years. The names of people in each household were noted on it; a drawing of Fidel Castro in uniform hung next to the map. In each room, black-and-white photographs of different revolutionary figures decorated the clinic’s bright blue walls. Dr. Romero made a point of saying that she was not told to, but chose to be surrounded by the images that inspire her commitment to her work.

The doctor said that she’s known generations of family members. She herself lives above her office in order to be available to patients outside of typical hours. Touring the clinic moved me to imagine what might be possible in a system where doctors are embedded as part of the community and not captive to a for-profit model of medicine.

The Cuban project offers an alternative, rooted in radical imagination, of what might be possible in a world without capitalism. Its people deserve to have a chance to exist and carry out their vision for socialism without being under the boot of the world’s most powerful nation.

Nearly every problem on the island can be traced back to the U.S. embargo which was first instituted in 1962 by President Kennedy after the Cuban government nationalized the investments of U.S. corporations such as United Fruit and Texaco.

The embargo originally targeted U.S.-Cuba trade relations. In 1996, the embargo went global with the passage of the Helms-Burton Act which punishes foreign companies that do business with both the U.S. and Cuba. In 2017, the Trump administration announced 243 measures to further tighten U.S. sanctions against Cuba. In his parting days, the former president (re)added the country to the State Sponsors of Terrorism list. The island’s economy sustained additional damage three years later when the pandemic devastated its tourism sector.

Cubans refer to the U.S. policy as the bloqueo, “blockade,” because it cuts off the island from much of the global economy as effectively as any direct military blockade could do. This small, broke island 90 miles from Miami poses no military threat to the United States. What it does pose is an ideological challenge. If the blockade were lifted, would Cuba’s people-centered socialist programs flourish? Who else would be inspired to do the same? The U.S. government doesn’t want to find out.

PARTY TIME: Hundreds of thousands of Cubans gathered in Havana’s Plaza de La Revolución on May 1 to celebrate International Workers Day for the first time since the pandemic began.

NOT-FOR-PROFIT MEDICINE: A Cuban doctor greets visitors to her office in a community health center where she has worked for decades serving the same neighborhood.

MAKING MOVES: Young skateboarders hone their skills in Havana.
SRI LANKA MAKES A SPLASH
BUT NOW WHAT?

By Amba Guerguerian

On July 9, thousands of Sri Lankan protesters stormed the presidential palace and sent the country’s president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, fleeing. In iconic images that flashed around the world on social media, Sri Lankans were seen taking selfies on the president’s canopied bed and splashing in his private swimming pool. As they wandered through the residence, Sri Lankans scrutinized the mansion’s luxuries and compared the air-conditioned space to their sweating, often dark homes plagued by months of power outages that first sent them into the streets.

The Sri Lankan uprising offered a moment of inspiration to people everywhere saddled with corrupt, out-of-touch elites intent on upholding a rigged system that had failed them (sound familiar?). How did they do it?

The Independent spoke with sources on-the-ground in Sri Lanka, who have asked to remain anonymous for fear of reprisal. Taking over the presidential palace, it turns out, may be the easiest challenge they will face. With a new interim president installed by parliament until 2024, there’s much uncertainty about what comes next.

The teardrop-shaped island nation of 22 million people just south of India has been in the throes of an economic meltdown. Beginning earlier this year, the country experienced an intense economic crisis under the Rajapaksa regime, whose policies included lifting taxes on the rich without planning other sources of revenue; making all the farmers start using organic fertilizer (literally) overnight, resulting in major crop loss; serious misuse of the country’s funds and international donations; and fuel shortages that resulted in 10-12 hour per day of power outages by the time the Gotagota protests erupted.

The Rajapaksa family owns resorts in the Seychelles and Maldives islands, hotel chains in Uganda, major shares in Ugandan airlines and several properties in the United States. They ran Sri Lanka much like a family business. The clan controlled the presidency from 2005-2015 and regained power in 2019 when Gotabaya took office, appointing two of his brothers and a pair of nephews to key government posts.

The Rajapaksa family dynasty finally ran out on April 9 when demonstrations erupted across the country. Many people traveled to the capital city of Colombo to protest with an assist from the railway workers union, risking police bullets when they took to the streets. On one occasion, angry protesters beat to death a member of parliament after he shot dead a protester.

“The people do have a threshold,” said Yathev, a medical student in Colombo, explaining that people from all classes were affected by the crisis. “The poor, the rich, the educated and the uneducated all went to the streets because they couldn’t take it anymore. There were doctors on the streets; there were engineers on the streets; there were taxi drivers on the streets; there were fishermen on the streets… There were cops who came onto the side of the people. In the middle of the protest they would just throw away everything that they had, and they’ll just start walking around with the people.”

As Sri Lankans flocked to Colombo, a massive encampment called GotaGoGama (gama means village in Sinhala) that managed webs of communication among protesters also established 25 Telegram groups (one for each district in Sri Lanka) that managed webs of communication among protesters around the country.

The same broad coalition of liberals, conservatives, socialists, LBTQ+ groups, pro and anti-military groups, Tamil separatists and others that brought down Gotabaya has since struggled with how to coalesce around a shared vision for the country’s future.

“There are so many different opposing and contradicting ideas, people from these different ideologies in this space,” HD said. “But the interesting thing has also been, how do we do it when there’s so many different views? What actually tied the whole thing together?”

On July 20, the Sri Lankan parliament chose Ranil Wickremesinghe as interim president — another political elite who has ties to the Rajapaksaas. It turns out the new boss is even harsher to dissidents than the old one.

When Wickremesinghe took office, he immediately cracked down on the protests. “The main protest groups declared they would vacate the occupied premises to strategize and not continue beating the same drum because the political set up has now changed,” reports DW, HD’s friend.

Nonetheless, the military and police attacked the unarmed protesters around midnight on the day Wickremesinghe was elected by Parliament. DW had driven by the GotaGoGama earlier that day.

“Everyone was already packing and leaving. The few people there were in the compound were using the next door building so it was largely a display of power on Wickremesinghe’s part,” he said.

The new president has also benefited from the desire felt by many Sri Lankans to return to some sense of normalcy “because otherwise there’s actually the possibility that people would starve and everything would completely crumble, and there are already signs of that,” DW said, pointing out that Sri Lanka can’t get funding from the World Bank, China, the United States or other world powers without the semblance of an established government.

“Wickremesinghe’s election is of course undemocratic. But it is constitutional,” DW wrote in a text message. “We will have to wait for a popular election, and on many fronts this is what is being demanded.” A timeframe for the current provisional government hasn’t yet been announced, although most assume that the next election will be in 2024, when Gotabaya’s term would have ended.

The economic crisis has eased, as “neoliberal short-term measures” have been adopted “in order to supply fuel, extra medicine and food and so on,” said P. Sri Lanka has also seen heavy monsoon rains this summer which feed the country’s hydroelectric dams. Power cuts have been reduced to around an hour per day which, he says, explains why “the public is less keen on protesting like before.”

What will happen to this protest movement that quickly reeced into the shadows? Smaller protests, rallies and press conferences continue even as the regime asks for the public’s help in tracking down individuals who participated in the July 9 takeover of the presidential palace and whose photos have been released to the media. Several activists have been arrested in “the most dodgy ways,” said DW.

“The ongoing protests are against such practices — and Ranil Wickremesinghe has been renamed ‘Ranil Rajapaksa,’ so this is definitely seen as a continuation of the same.”
By Bennett Baumner

Bill Gross, the investment-firm manager who pioneered the speculative bond-trading market of the 1980s and was dubbed the “Bond King” by Fortune magazine, once described debt as the “mighty lubricant of capitalism’s engine, allowing its pistons to accelerate at an increasing pace as financial innovation mixed with our own animal spirits produced more and more profits, more and more jobs, more and more everything.” That mighty lubricant has been cheap most of this century, but that has changed recently, if perhaps only temporarily.

The Federal Reserve Bank’s deep interventions in the 21st century’s economy have included providing a river of liquidity to shore up the banking system during the Great Recession and purchasing massive quantities of government and institutional debt through quantitative easing. It also created a low-interest-rate regime that fueled asset prices on everything from urban and suburban homes to tech stocks. We are seeing what happens when the lubricant of cheap debt runs dry: Stocks nosedive and borrowing costs rise.

Stefan Eich’s The Currency of Politics tracks central bank power. Central banks are charged with ensuring the functioning of capitalism, but their role has been depoliticized, thus shielding them from the “burden of democratic justification for the distributive consequences of their actions.” Quantitative easing, debt interest rates and asset-price valuations lend a technocratic air to the Federal Reserve. MAGA chuds can slap Joe Biden “I did that” stickers on gas pumps and deny the impact of Russian military aggression, Western economic sanctions, and oil-company price-gouging. Biden takes the blame for the triple-digit cost of filling up vehicles nearly the size of Sherman tanks, not the leaders of the Federal Reserve’s 12 regional banks.

Money in The Currency of Politics is not just legal tender exchanged for goods and services, taxes, or debt and equity, but a “political project suspended between trust and violence.” In other words, dollars are the de facto global currency, because the United States currently is the leading capitalist power that spends unfathomable money on its war machine and can dictate world economic and social relations. Thus far the redistributive consequences of higher interest rates have mainly been Wall Street bankers seeing their stock portfolios shed value and the proverbial “pain at the pump” for Main Street commuters. But there could be darker clouds on the horizon. During the 1970s inflationary period, unionized workers could shield themselves from price increases by bargaining for bigger raises — but while the COVID-19 pandemic’s labor shortages have temporarily given employees more bargaining power, wage increases have not kept pace with inflation. Developing countries could also get wallowed by rising interest rates on sovereign and private debt, dwindling dollar reserves, and currency destabilization, thus triggering cascading defaults and social upheaval like that in Sri Lanka this summer.

Eich summons a long philosophical tradition from Aristotle to Edmund Burke and F.A. Hayek versus John Maynard Keynes on the politics of money, though his book acknowledges few countervailing forces to central bank power. However, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has vowed to bring inflation down even if the blunt instrument of rising interest rates results in significant job losses. The redistributive consequences would then be in plain sight.

Hiking interest rates the only weapon to fight price increases? The Biden administration has largely ceded political and economic ground to the Fed, although it has floated the idea of tax hikes for the wealthy, which could free up cash for large governmental investments in key job-producing sectors such as green energy.

Elements of this approach were included in the Inflation Reduction Act. A key component of inflation is fossil-fuel prices. The job market is tight, yet the country only recently fully recovered all the lost jobs from the COVID shutdown and supply and labor disruptions. If the economy produced more goods and services to meet demand, this could cool price increases.

Prolific writer Adam Tooze’s Shutdown: How COVID Shook the World’s Economy and Eich’s The Currency of Politics urge progressive readers to consider money and the inner workings of capitalism. Shutdown documents the massive fiscal stimulus unleashed to combat the global economic downturn precipitated by COVID-19. In Tooze’s book, the lesson is that brash left-inspired spending plans filled the intellectual void created by unpopular neoliberal austerity. The left should remember that their ideas won that policy fight and were also adopted by more conservative governments around the globe.

I would like to suggest that people on the left read more economics and business media. A good place to start is Mary Childs’s fantastic The Bond King.

The Bond King follows the rise and demise of Bill Gross, who ran what was once the world’s largest bond fund. It’s worth a peek into the paranoia, greed and double-dealing at his asset-management firm. Gross made billions trading bonds — government and corporate debt obligations — and used his firm’s market share to convince the U.S. government to intervene in mortgage and debt markets during the Great Recession. The Bond King puts in plain terms how large asset-management firms’ interests influenced the government and Federal Reserve.

Another crisis, climate change, threatens asset management, even as passive funds, algorithmically pegged to stock indexes, continue to pump money into fossil-fuel companies. While some pension funds have waged activist battles to compel corporations to address environmental concerns, they have borne little fruit until recently. But big asset management has a fiduciary duty to maintain their investments over a longer period. You cannot invest in Miami if it is going to be under water.

If climate change is “the greatest market failure the world has ever seen,” then we cannot count on capitalism to solve global warming, but we should demand that private capital be used to fund the transition, in tandem with sorely needed major government investments. The climate establishment is still in the thrall of austerity economics. They will wield the specter of inflation and rising interest rates as an argument against the much-needed green transition and long-overdue social safety net. The broad left will need to counter that.
CONSPIRACY THEORIES, THEN & NOW

The Parallax View
Directed by Alan J. Pakula, 1974
102 min.

By Rosa Marin

A recent Reuters Institute report suggests that over 40% of Americans "actively avoid the news ... because it grinds them down or they just don’t believe it." Who can blame them? We’re living through a cycle of crises often referred to as "unprecedented." However, this era of stark inequality, conspiracies and political instability has some kinship with the early 1970s, the first half of which were defined by the embarrassing retreat of American forces from Vietnam and the Watergate scandal. The OPEC oil embargo of 1973 — Arab leaders’ reprisal to U.S. support of Israel as it annexed major territories in the Yom Kippur War — triggered a worldwide recession. Major urban centers from Los Angeles to New York City were in a state of decay. There was nowhere to turn; freedom fighters around the world were being stymied and killed.

The United States was reeling from a succession of political assassinations: Malcolm X in 1965, Martin Luther King in 1968, liberal presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy barely two months later and the young Black Panther Party activist Fred Hampton in 1969. In Latin America, Che Guevara had been murdered by CIA-backed counterinsurgency forces in Bolivia in 1967, and Chilean democratic-socialist President Salvador Allende killed in a U.S.-backed military coup in 1973. That same year, the OPEC oil embargo triggered a worldwide recession.

Public trust in government was at an unprecedented low, paranoia permeated the air and despair had become "as American as apple pie" — the advertising tagline for The Parallax View, a pessimistic cinematic gem released in 1974. Directed by Alan J. Pakula, it starred Warren Beatty as Joe Frady, an alcoholic journalist trying to uncover the truth behind an assassination. It’s a merciless film born of a merciless time.

The film’s opening minutes unfold quickly and viscerally. It’s July 4 in Seattle, and Senator Charles Carroll, an up-and-coming politician and possible presidential hopeful, is assassinated atop the Space Needle in front of his wife, journalists and numerous bystanders, including Frady. After a chaotic shootout and chase, the alleged assassin plunges to his death, falling off the Space Needle. There is no reviving Senator Carroll, and we realize we won’t be getting many answers as to who or what was behind the assassination.

The film does an excellent job of punctuating helplessness, such as when a faceless and nameless “committee,” shrouded in sinister shadows by cinematographer Gordon Willis, tells the world that months of investigation and hearings have revealed that Senator Carroll was killed by a lone gunman. There was no “wider conspiracy.” Instead, it was an individual, now dead, with a “misguided sense of patriotism” and a “psychotic desire for public recognition.”

This explanation isn’t enough for Frady, as he slowly uncovers that the Carroll assassination was but a minute note in the grand orchestration of the Parallax Corporation, an entity with more sway than the U.S. government. Yet the word “parallax” means that the apparent position of an object differs depending on where one is looking from. The Parallax Corporation could be an arm of the government, or vice-versa.

The film’s reality isn’t just relatable because of the existence of the simultaneously omnipresent and secretive corporation. It also expertly conveys the helplessness one individual feels in an increasingly complicated world, prophesying our era’s heightened obsession with shadowy cabals and mass murders by supposedly crazed, often white-supremacist lone gunmen. Vulnerability and isolation are amplified by the film’s wide shots, which frame Warren Beatty’s Frady against large backdrops such as dams, buildings and crowds.

While there is something unique in The Parallax View’s Kafkaesque approach to the labyrinthine complexities of corporations and governments, the film was part of a wider movement known as the New American Cinema that both directly and indirectly expressed dissatisfaction with the health of the body politic. It was the coalescence of various film movements, such as Italian neo-realism and the French New Wave (Nouvelle Vague), at the intersection of young American directors, such as Martin Scorcese and Francis Ford Coppola, and studios willing to take a risk on them. Many of the films of the New American Cinema featured disaffected and alienated protagonists, as seen in films such as Mike Nichols’ The Graduate (1967) and Scorcese’s Taxi Driver (1976). These films didn’t offer easy solutions, as they embodied an angst and anger that had replaced the hopes shot down by assassins or beaten by police in the late ’60s.

Pakula would go on to direct All the President’s Men (1976), which dramatized the Washington Post’s reporting of President Richard Nixon’s involvement in the Watergate scandal. The cynicism of Joe Frady’s ’70s eventually gave way to the yuppiedecadence of the ’80s and Ronald Reagan, who believed the far right to power in Washington. The world of 2022 is as confusing and complicated as it is grim, which is what makes believing in conspiracy theories easy for a lot of people. Late capitalism distracts from the fact that the rich and the powerful are actively conspiring against the workers of the world. Its compartmentalizing and isolating apparatuses heighten the risk of falling prey to false and predatory theories. Lone shooters are radicalized and inspired by the connections they make in the darker realms of the Internet.

In watching The Parallax View in 2022, with the film depicting a powerful corporate cabal secretly orchestrating political assassinations and acts of terrorism to benefit the status quo, this writer could not help but draw parallels with the far right’s obsession with conspiracy theories such as QAnon, whose followers believe Donald Trump will save the world from a satanic cabal of pedophiles that includes Democratic politicians and Hollywood actors.

The Parallax View’s blindingly brilliant ending offers no way out in the face of calamity. The film warns us not to fall into the same trap as Joe Frady, who loses himself trying to single-handedly uncover an insurmountable plot. Given the current level of demobilization on the left, it’s hard to see how we can stop large calamities like war, climate change and a looming recession. However, we can organize our buildings, our workplaces and continue showing up for our neighbors at mutual aid spaces with an eye toward the day when we can fight for broader, systemic change. It is in these smaller settings that we can foster community and prepare for whatever is coming our way. The way to a better world isn’t by checking out, it’s by turning on, turning in and doing something about it.
Reverend Billy,

Have you been following the Webb Telescope and the photos of the universe it’s been taking? That’s some wild shit. That telescope will also be checking out the atmospheres of planets orbiting other stars to see what’s up. Do you think there’s life throughout the universe like some scientists say? Or is Planet Earth the one and only?

— CHARLES

Charles, you are the one and only.

The Webb didn’t find another Earth and I’m glad. If you go chasing a second Earth in the sky — then you’re just a consumer looking for the next blockbuster, a thousand special effects wired to make me think that I’m not really here. No I’m in a second place that is just as real as anything I ever experienced. That’s the big lie. There is no second Earth. The recovery of the first one from the corporate toxins, over-population and the rest — that is what we should see when we are FAR-SEEING.

All of us were dazzled by the night sky before the big telescopes were downloading the final frontiers. The night sky as it was, back in the day when the pollution of profits wasn’t smogging up the joint — we saw farther in those clear nights with our one and only miraculous telescope — the naked eye.

Sincerely,
REVEREND BILLY

How is that possible? What fountain of youth have you discovered? My husband is 20 years younger than you, and I wish be had your vitality and stamina.

Warmly Yours,
SECRET ADMIRER

Dear Secret,

I’ll read your letter to my aching back.

Nine out ten of the people who are my age have now returned to the world, spreading out across the land and sea as if they are looking for something, spinning everywhere as molecules and a million invisible things that we don’t have names for. The dead come back into us, come up at us as mushrooms and down at us like falling leaves and come into us as vibrating music. John Coltrane is in our bodies with “A Love Supreme”.

Then of course we live in a narco-state called Consumerism and so when some of us die we are filled with chemicals and locked in coffins. Formaldehyde is supposed to make you look younger, if a bit chalky... I wonder if I could arrange to be filled with preservatives and stuffed in a Reverend Billy pose in my pink suit, with a looping recording “Stop Shopping! Stop Shopping!” Plant me in Time Square between the Naked Cowboy and Mickey Mouse... Eternal youth!

REV BILLY

Reverend Billy Teal is the Pastor of the Church of Stop Shopping. Have a question for the Reverend? Email RevBilly@Revbilly.com and Unburden your soul.

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