

Over the Hill

“The Next Society” by Peter Drucker, in *The Economist* (Nov. 3, 2001), P.O. Box 58524, Boulder, Colo. 80322–8524.

“The new economy may or may not materialize, but there is no doubt that the next society will be with us shortly,” predicts Drucker, the noted author and professor of social science and management at Claremont Graduate University.

Demography is the driving force behind Drucker’s new society. The rapid aging of the populations of the United States and other developed nations means that all the promises about maintaining social security programs in their current form are written on air: “In another 25 years people will have to keep working until their mid-seventies, health permitting,” Drucker declares. Benefits will be “substantially lower” than they are today.

It’s less widely recognized that the younger population in the developed countries is rapidly shrinking. In Germany, with the world’s third largest economy, total population is expected to decline from 82 million today to between 70 and 73 million in 2030. The traditional “working age population” will shrink at an even faster rate, from 40 to 30 million. Almost half the population will be over 65. The pattern is much the same in countries such as Japan, France, Italy, and even relatively undeveloped China. Low birthrates are the primary cause. The United States will face a milder form of change. High rates of immigration during the past several decades will keep total population growing (slowly) through 2030 and mitigate the challenges of a society going gray.

Throughout the nations of the developed world, the demographic crunch is likely to

make immigration a leading political issue. It’s already beginning to reshape politics in these countries. Right-wing, anti-immigrant parties have enjoyed surprising success in Europe. Again, things are likely to be somewhat different in the United States, notes Drucker, since it has a long political and cultural history of dealing with immigration.

Out of these demographic trends will emerge “two workforces,” Drucker believes. The under-50s will follow conventional career paths. The over-50s will combine increased leisure with part-time or temporary jobs and work as contractors and consultants. This trend is already under way, especially among managers, engineers, and other “knowledge workers.” As the work force ages, corporations that hope to attract talented help will need to radically rethink the way they organize work—and workers will need to prepare for lives that won’t be consumed by full-time careers after 50.

Drucker also thinks that high-level “knowledge workers” will eventually cede pride of place to the growing corps of “knowledge technologists”—those who do some form of manual work but require formal education, such as computer technicians, nurses, and paralegals. “Knowledge technologists are likely to become the dominant social—and perhaps also political—force over the next decades.”

Drucker’s essay is full of provocative ideas. But its greatest power as a portent may lie in the author’s own story: Perhaps the world’s most highly regarded futurist, he is 91 years old.

Sushi vs. McWorld

“Supply-Side Sushi: Commodity, Market, and the Global City” by Theodore C. Bestor, in *American Anthropologist* (Mar. 2001), American Anthropological Assoc., Ste. 640, 4350 N. Fairfax Dr., Arlington, Va. 22203–1620.

On a dock early one evening in tiny West Point, Maine, several fishing crews and a mix of American and Japanese buyers gather for a silent auction. The bidders inspect 20

Atlantic bluefin tuna weighing 270 to 610 pounds each. A few decades ago, the giant fish sold (if they could be sold at all) for cat food at a penny a pound. Now, a high-