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They Say Cut Back, We Say Fight Back! Welfare Activism in an Era of Retrenchment. By Ellen Reese. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011. 312 pp. ISBN 978-0-87154-714-9, \$42.50 (Cloth).

Any veteran of the welfare reform battles of the 1990s would find it hard to think of those years as anything but a resounding defeat for poor mothers and their allies. Indeed, the dramatic changes to welfare programs at state and federal levels over that period stand out as super victories for conservative and neoliberal forces. Conservatives, exemplified by Newt Gingrich, arguing that welfare promoted poverty-creating behaviors successfully implemented a slew of punitive rules that effectively discouraged usage. They also achieved a long-term goal of reduced real federal spending on welfare while devolving policy and administrative authority and fiscal responsibility to the states. Neoliberals, most notably Bill Clinton, were deeply committed to reshaping poverty programs to promote employment, knowing it would most often be low-wage employment. This dovetailed nicely with free trade agreements and other policies promoting globalization all the while creating a demand for low-wage service workers in the United States. The result was pretty much the end of welfare as an antipoverty program, evidenced by the dramatic decline in participation in the program since the mid-1990s and the anemic growth in the welfare rolls during the Great Recession.

In *They Say Cut Back*, Ellen Reese looks back on that time and argues that while the welfare wars may have been lost, not all the battles were. She draws our attention to several successful organizing efforts in California counties and in the state of Wisconsin and reminds the reader that a closer look at these battles provides important lessons today. Her research is based on a large number of interviews conducted between 1998 and 2008 and on participant observation at meetings, rallies, and public forums, complemented by published academic research and popular media accounts. Reese focuses on the interstices between federal policy formation and local and state implementation as well as on the importance of coalition building.

Then-President Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996, dramatically transforming America's cash assistance program to poor families. The act abolished the Aid to Family with Dependent Children program, a matching grant cash-assistance program established in the 1935 Social Security Act, and created a block grant called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The federal legislation established time limits, set parameters for strict work requirements, capped funds, and provided enormous leeway for states to set eligibility rules and administer the program. Almost all welfare recipients at the time of passage were poor women and their children, including a large share of women of color who had successfully claimed welfare since only the late 1960s through demands won by the welfare rights movement. Given who received welfare, as Reese argues and demonstrates, debates over the program were deeply infused with views about gender, race, and class in the United States.

Reese sets out to "show how, and under what conditions, activists build influential coalitions and, in effect, successfully impacted four types of state and local welfare policies in California and Wisconsin" (p. 12). In separate chapters of the book Reese analyzes political challenges mounted against the elimination of legal immigrants' benefits, privatization of welfare administration, implementation of workfare programs, and levels of child care benefits. While the success of these various forms of pushback were highly limited and very proscribed, Reese discusses ways in which poor people's grassroots organizations found allies to take on and reshape some aspects of welfare implementation. Her key argument is that grassroots activism can stop or at least reshape retrograde federal policies as long as activists are facile at working through various political and legal institutions and can organize and mobilize national, statewide, and local allies and coalition members.

There are three key types of organizations that Reese follows and documents in these struggles: welfare and low-income organizations, immigrant rights groups, and unions representing workers in the public sector and in private industries that rely heavily on public financing. While all these groups are directly affected by welfare policies, each has its own form of organizing members as well as varying levels of human and financial resources. The now-defunct Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) play major roles in these struggles. Coalitions are never easy,

and Reese certainly does not gloss over the tensions among groups, especially over forming strategy. She discusses the battles among the various unions (SEIU, Communication Workers of America, and AFSCME) as well as with ACORN over who might best represent child care workers. She describes the difficult decision to promote “deserving” immigrants, such as the Hmong who had helped the United States in Vietnam, over other groups when organizing to keep legal immigrants receiving public benefits—despite representing far more immigrants who were seen as less deserving (e.g., Mexican immigrants). Reese also pays considerable attention to ways in which political leaders respond and/or lead, focusing on state politicians in Wisconsin and county-level ones in California.

Taking account of these struggles is important for at least two reasons. First, “bottom up” documentation of poor women’s social movements during this period is sparse. Having such a resource is itself a valuable research contribution. Second, as Reese’s subtitle to the book suggests, the work documents the ways in which progressive social movements have adapted strategies in a period of conservative ascendancy. More important, however, is her depiction and analysis of how less powerful groups might effectively combat federal devolution. While conservatives have crafted a strategy of giving states more political authority and fiscal responsibilities, this creates time-honored spaces and avenues for effective pushback. Some of the most interesting lessons from the book include the unfolding of the ways in which local groups effectively link with statewide and national movements to craft messages specifically tailored to local conditions, institutions, and politics. Coalitions in California and Wisconsin, for example, planned specific messages while effectively organizing key local or state political leaders to rethink welfare policies. The story of how Wisconsin’s Republican governor and welfare reform architect Tommy Thompson acted to avoid completely defunding immigrants provides a compelling example.

The coalitions developed and the strategies employed that Reese lays out in her book remain highly relevant in poor mothers’ struggles today. But, the “hats” that poor and low-income moms are wearing have changed from welfare recipients to equally vulnerable low-wage workers. That the struggles over living wage ordinances; paid family leave and sick days; and union and legal representation of low-wage workers such as child care workers, home health aides, and janitors have been waged by the exact same players and in the wake of welfare reform is no coincidence. Conservatives, however, have recently figured this out as well and gone after these groups with a vengeance. Right-wing media and federal politicians effectively demonized and then destroyed ACORN, the key player in living wage fights. Republican state governors are working on doing the same to public sector workers and their unions such as AFSCME. At the same time, they are shredding state funding that goes to private sector entities that provide health care and social assistance to low-income families made up of low-wage workers, many of whom are now represented by SEIU and other unions. Reese’s work takes on particular resonance as the retrenchment take-down trickles up.

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Disintegrating Democracy at Work: Labor Unions and the Future of Good Jobs in the Service Economy. By Virginia Doellgast. Ithaca and London: ILR Press, an imprint of Cornell University Press, 2012. 248 pp. ISBN 978-0-8014-5047-1, \$65.00 (Cloth); ISBN 978-0-8014-7799-7, \$24.95 (Paperback).

The shift from manufacturing to services has brought forth questions regarding the implications and outcomes for the growing number of workers employed in marginal service sector jobs. Will competitive pressures arising from globalization and market liberalization lead to global convergence on low-road employment models, or can institutions and strategic actors continue to play a role in shaping management strategies and worker outcomes, even in these peripheral workplaces? These are questions that Virginia Doellgast seeks to answer in *Disintegrating Democracy at Work*. Through a compelling comparative analysis of work reorganization in U.S. and German call centers following the liberalization of telecommunications