

"We Are All Fast-Food Workers Now": The Global Uprising Against Poverty Wages

Annelise Orleck

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To understand the impact of poverty wages on the world's workers, history professor Annelise Orleck traveled around the United States and the world, conducting 140 interviews, reviewing documents, and studying news reports. This compelling book is the result. It exposes the all-too-common practice of corporations paying poverty wages but also celebrates the courageous resistance movement that has become a global force.

Taking its title from a "Fight for \$15" activist's quote, the book is divided into five sections. The first part offers an overview of the global uprising against poverty wages with chapters that highlight affected workers, including fast-food employees, berry pickers, factory workers, and hotel housekeepers. In the second part, the reader is introduced to the global "precariat," a class that faces an uncertain, precarious life. Through superb descriptions supplemented by salient quotes, Orleck provides the necessary context for her argument.

Parts three and four of the book hone in on garment workers and farm workers. This allows Orleck to pointedly focus on stories in industries where poverty wages run rampant. Painstaking research and eye-opening interviews enhance the text. Among the most startling and disturbing contrasts is the stylish fashion industry, which depends on developing-world garment workers who are underpaid and often abused. On the positive side are success stories like the Fair Food Program, created by an alternative labor union to turn Florida tomato fields "from the most hellish of American agricultural workplaces" to among the best.

The last section of the book addresses "local victories and transformative visions," important initiatives that help overcome income inequality. While part five sets a generally optimistic tone, it is the heartbreaking struggles of the world's workers uncovered in this excellent book that will undoubtedly leave a lasting impression.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (March/April 2018)

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