

FOREWORD

School food politics is one of those places where everything meets: nutrition, agriculture, institutional politics, community involvement in the life of the new generation, and state investment in social reproduction. It is a place where we can rethink what we need to give a good future to the next generation. The food children eat is the product of so many activities, interventions, and relations, each with political significance.

Food is the sustenance of life. It has been one of the most widespread, common, and ancient activities for women. Once reproductive activities go to the market, they are extremely underpaid, extremely precarious, and extremely low-valued. It pains me that so many aspects of domestic work and even cooking have become so oppressive because of the condition in which women have had to perform it. And it pains me that many feminists have internalized the devaluation of this activity.

Of course, we must make the connection between what is happening on the home front and what is happening on the agricultural farm. The industrialization of agriculture has produced a constant contamination of soil and water through pesticides and all kinds of chemical inputs. This system is producing a kind of food that is more deleterious than nutritious. What the market—and capitalism—have offered us is fast food products, which are responsible for a steady increase in obesity and disease around the world, even among young people.

When we have a food system that is driven by a logic that devalues life, that devaluation can spill over into all areas of reproductive activity. It has become extremely difficult for women, for families, and for communities to provide the kind of services, work, and resources that are necessary to produce healthy, prosperous human beings. Eating a school meal may seem to be a microscopic activity, but when we put an expanding lens on it, we see so much. *Transforming School Food Politics around the World* puts the spotlight on the whole broad network of relations that must work together simultaneously to provide the meal.

School food traverses so many questions and so many kinds of struggle. It is a microcosm of something much bigger. I'm very skeptical when I hear so many of my feminist sisters say, "social services, social services." But what kind? And who decides what they're going to look like? The state controls social wealth, so there must be all kinds of engagements with the state—conflictual and negotiation—from many different agents. We need to have a kind of social fabric, a kind of *community* fabric, that has the capacity to interfere with the state and control what kind of social services it provides and how they are organized. Otherwise, we are going to have social services that are so degraded, that are so reduced to the minimum available, that in many cases they will not fulfill the expectations we have of them.

Unless there is control over the wealth produced and how it is used, it is not possible to transform society. Schools have a very central and strategic role in this process. What happens in schools with children, and what happens with the people who are in charge of social reproduction in the schools? School food workers now work in conditions that are really inequitable because of the devaluation of reproductive work under capitalism. This is the product of a state that always gives the minimum and gives the minimum because they can get away with it. There is no conflict between the well-being of the children and the well-being of school food workers. If the children are given more or better food, this does not necessarily mean that school food workers will be overburdened or even more underpaid than before. This is an artificial conflict and a microcosm of all the conflict that we suffer now. We see this in hospitals where patients and their nurses appear as two opposite interests. It is not

opposite interests but rather the state that is organizing that we fight against each other.

To break that very hellish circle, families and people in the community need to intervene. They must recognize a whole network of relations: the condition of the school food workers impacts the condition of food provision, which impacts the condition of the children. It's a question of what organizational work and what kinds of relations—affective and otherwise—need to take place for somebody to go to school, to be cared for, and to have a good lunch? “Good,” not only in providing the proper nutrients but also “good” because it is organized by people who care for the child and who receive support for themselves from the community and from the state.

Many things radiate from food and from the social rituals and practices of sharing a meal. Food establishes social relationships and brings together knowledge of the body, of nature, and of cultural activities. There is creativity in the process of eating, commenting, interacting, and looking at what other people like or do not like. It is so important for students to be brought to parks, to botanical gardens, and to community gardens to learn that the vegetables are not coming from plastic, they're not coming from the supermarket, and to absorb that knowledge and that magic.

Food and love are what bring people together, so we must not forget the importance of children eating together. This collection focuses on that very beautiful topic, and the range of international perspectives make it of great value and inspiration.

Silvia Federici, April 17, 2023

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