

★ Birth Strike: The Hidden Fight over Women's Work

Jenny Brown

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Upset at the cost of prenatal care, hospital deliveries, unpaid leave, and years of childcare? Imagine if all the eighteen- to forty-year-old women in the US simply refused to have babies. Do you think Washington and corporate America would care, well aware that our tax base and a sustainable workforce all depend on women being willing to get pregnant? Of course they'd care!

It might take such a birth strike for the power structures in our country to grudgingly agree to assist mothers (and fathers) with the costs of bearing children, recognizing that it serves the greater good. With the 2018 fertility rate down to a 32-year low of 1.7 children per woman, we can be all but certain that serious private discussions are happening among establishment leaders.

Also at play in the birth rate debate is the fact that one in three pregnancies in the US is unintended and 45 percent unplanned, at a time when it's more difficult for US women to gain access to birth control, abortion, and other healthcare. Women seem to be losing ground in the battle to control their own bodies.

In *Birth Strike: The Hidden Fight Over Women's Work*, Jenny Brown notes the discouraging trends, but also recognizes the leverage women are gaining as birth rates fall. Seasoned by the lessons of 1970s era feminism and Europe's more liberal societies, she thoughtfully argues that maternity is uncompensated labor: "While the whole society gains the benefits—and especially employers—the costs [of raising children] are privatized onto parents, especially women." *Birth Strike* is a masterpiece of reasoning and insight.

MATT SUTHERLAND (July/August 2019)

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