Labor and the Military: Introduction

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The military and the working class have intersected in myriad ways, especially in the era of mass conscription. Millions of workers served in, fought in, and died in the armed services. They brought their political and cultural values into armies and their military experiences back into labor movements and working-class communities. Militaries have been large employers of civilians, on bases in home countries and abroad, directly and indirectly, in the vast armament industries. In some countries, like China and Iran, they directly control large parts of the economy, including major industrial establishments. Military employment practices have reflected and shaped civilian-sector labor relations, race relations, and gender roles. Armies have been used to break strikes and have launched coups designed to defeat left-wing and labor movements or, occasionally (as in Portugal and, more recently, Venezuela), to defeat conservative forces. Twenty years after the end of the Cold War, war and militarism remain prominent features of both advanced industrial societies and less developed ones.

Labor historians have not paid a great deal of attention to the military. They have studied some facets of its relationship to the working class, such as military strikebreaking and the wartime mobilization of labor (the subject of a group of essays in *ILWCH* 58 in fall 2000). But they have largely or completely ignored others. In an effort to promote work in this broad field, *ILWCH* issued a call for article proposals dealing with labor and the military. We soon discovered that our interest in this subject is widely shared; we received more than twenty proposals, including research on Latin America, the Ottoman Empire, Africa, and the Soviet Union. Their quality and the diverse themes they addressed (including gender, mercenaries, social mobility, racial anthropometry, antimilitarism, and governmental policies toward disabled veterans) made the task of selection very difficult. In the end, we gave priority to articles that addressed issues not previously much explored, at the expense of passing over fine scholarship in more familiar territory.

The articles in this issue address overlapping issues in a variety of geographic settings. The use of armed force against workers' movements appears repeatedly in the history of labor, a story usually told from the point of view of labor. Priscilla Murolo takes a different approach in her article on the United States army in the decades after the Civil War, focusing on how Army leaders viewed labor conflict, recounting the military discourse about the deployment of soldiers during labor battles. Murolo argues that the military

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view of worker struggles needs to be understood in the context of two other "wars of civilization," the suppression of Native Americans and the defeat of Philippine independence forces after the Spanish-American War. The use of the military to counter labor, Murolo suggests, was part of a process that led to the creation of an imperial state. Joshua Freeman picks up this story, moving forward in time from the Philippine War into the post-World War Two era through a look at the career of General Brice V. Disque. From his early days supervising a military prison in the Philippines, through a stint running a civilian prison and his role as an army officer crushing labor militancy during World War One, to his final job negotiating labor contracts on behalf of oil and coal dealers, Disque concerned himself with the problems of labor management. His path in and out of the army suggests the close, complex relationship between labor relations in the civilian economy and in the military and penal spheres, settings normally seen as quite separate. Michelle Moyd examines the relationship between an imperial army and labor in the very different setting of German East Africa. Her archival research in Tanzania and Germany shows how the Kaiserreich employed both African soldiers and their family members and dependents to perform a wide range of labor for the colonial state. But in addition to illustrating how European colonizers relied upon cheap colonial labor to project their power, Moyd also shows how African soldiers understood their relationship to the German military and pursued their own goals of enhancing their status and ranking among other East African colonial subjects and as men with their household dependents.

The essays of Elizabeth Shesko and Geoffrey Field focus on the military and national identity. Shesko's research on Bolivia shows how the military could function as a vehicle for integrating the *patria* and incorporating the working class into the nation's social and cultural structures. She examines the daily life of Bolivian conscripts and the multiple forms of labor they traditionally performed—not only combat, protecting borders, and internal repression, but nonmartial labors such as logging, constructing roads, preparing land for cultivation, and irrigation projects. While the type of labor conscripts undertook often had the effect of reinforcing social and racial hierarchies, Shesko reveals how, after the 1952 revolution, the discourse surrounding nonmartial labor changed profoundly, emphasizing its vital role in the project of nation-building and modernization. All the essays in this issue illustrate the ways that armies reflect the values, attitudes, and priorities of their societies. Geoffrey Field focuses on the transformation of the British army during the Second World War from a small professional organization, largely charged with policing the empire, into a mass conscript force, capable of fighting a modern war in Europe and Southeast Asia. He examines the tensions that developed between wartime propaganda that this was a "people's war" in which the nation was becoming more democratic and inclusive and an army in which the division between officers and "Other Ranks" continued to reflect class differences. He also shows how servicemen resorted to strikes and other forms of action to protest unfair treatment and

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to legitimize political debate in a military whose disciplinary codes remained profoundly resistant to adjusting to the rights of "civilians in uniform."

Jennifer Mittelstadt also takes up the issue of soldiers' rights in the context of the United States in the 1970s, analyzing the attempt of a public employees union to combat the erosion of military benefits by organizing soldiers. This fueled an intense debate, inside and outside the military, about what made laboring in a military uniform different from working in the civilian economy. Though the unionization effort aborted, military leaders adroitly seized the opportunity it created to win backing for improved benefits for soldiers and their families, in the process bolstering the image of military labor as national service, not employment.

These articles just begin to address the large field of labor and the military. Much remains to be done, including research into such subjects as labor processes in the armed services; labor battalions; armies as civilian employers; trends toward privatizing military work instead of utilizing the labor of military recruits; the recruitment of working-class women into the armed forces and auxiliaries; race and gender and the working-class military experience; working-class conscripts in colonial wars; demobilization and its impact on labor markets; veterans and veterans' organizations (including union veterans' committees); military service as a pathway to citizenship; military dependents and their treatment; and military memoirs as a genre of working-class writing. *ILWCH* is far from alone in encouraging research in this field. In April 2011 Duke University sponsored a conference entitled "Beyond the Battlefield: The Labor of Military Service in Latin America and the Caribbean," which examined some of these issues in a regional context. The International Institute of Social History has launched a multinational, multiyear project on "'Fighting for a living': Origins, practices and consequences of different forms of military employment in Europe, the Middle East and Asia (1500–2000)," which will culminate in the publication of a book of essays in late 2012. War and the military have been a fact of life for working classes throughout history, an experience we need to know more about. *ILWCH* hopes to revisit this subject and encourages future article submissions.

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