

Senior Editors' Note

In this issue of *International Labor and Working-Class History*, we take on a subject we have long wanted to address: contextualizing military service, campaigns, and structures in terms of labor and class. Two members of our editorial board, Joshua Freeman and Geoffrey Field, have brought together an exciting array of papers that investigate the questions of military labor from different angles. This section includes articles on Bolivia, Great Britain, the United States, and German East Africa: (Tanzania), reflecting *ILWCH's* aspiration to present global history. Each examines not only what it meant to labor for the military—tasks that involved a heavy degree of manual and service work—but also the social context of such work. They look at forms of discipline within modern armies not just as training in soldiering but as the development of capitalist managerial strategies and skills. In some settings, we see further how these were transplanted to private industry. In Britain during the Second World War, Bolivia at mid-century, and the United States in the 1970s, soldiers forced military officers to face questions of how modern notions of citizenship could be reconciled with the unilateral regime of discipline within military culture.

The authors in this section emphasize the class experience of military service and work. Who entered what kind of service under what terms? How did it become a class formation process? The authors take a close look at barracks experience, daily life while on campaign or during transport, and what military workers were expected to do during “peacetime.” We see the military as strikebreakers, but we also see strikes and resistance from within. Under what conditions did the barracks become a space of resistance? The intersections of colonial militaries, labor regimes, and disciplinary practices could produce surprising results.

This issue of *ILWCH* contains one of our regular features, the Scholarly Controversy, a roundtable discussion. Joseph McCartin sets up the discussion with his essay, “Probing the Limits of Rights Discourse in the Obama Era: A Crossroads for Labor and Liberalism,” which critiques the political formulation of labor rights as human rights. For McCartin, a central question is: Has the human rights framework really been an effective vehicle for advancing workers' collective interests? He argues that it is too rooted in a liberal conception of rights that is inherently individualistic. Moreover, in the US, anti-union forces have become adept at using the language of human rights, and especially the right of freedom of association, to attack unions as enemies of individual freedom. McCartin suggests returning to notions of solidarity, democracy, and collective power. We then have compelling responses to McCartin's essay by law professor Lance Compa, author of the Human Rights Watch Report *Unfair Advantage: Workers' Freedom of Association in the United*

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States under International Human Rights Standards; historian Gay Seidman, who challenges him from an international perspective; and economist Richard McIntyre. Seidman highlights transnational labor activists who have found that deploying a human rights discourse has allowed them to attract international attention where a more traditional rhetoric of union solidarity might have gone unnoticed. By contrast, McIntyre interrogates whether the kind of collective power and group rights—to organize and bargain collectively—that are needed to take on global production chains can be won through a human rights framework.

While we were moving into the final stages of pulling this issue together, remarkable events overtook us, particularly the democratic uprisings in the Middle East and the wave of protest in Wisconsin over labor rights. As a journal concerned with the power, fate, and solidarity of workers around the world, we felt we couldn't let this moment pass without marking the struggles of early 2011 as historic moments. Historian Joel Beinin offers us a historical contextualization of the role of workers in what Egyptians now call the January 25 Revolution and explains why and how a new Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions emerged, bringing to fruition years of social movement organizing. From Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin faculty member Chad Goldberg reports on the spontaneous and vigorous defense of democracy that erupted in Wisconsin as its new governor opened a direct attack on state workers. These essays give us a glimpse of the rights, political power, and democracy issues, addressed in the above scholarly controversy, playing out at this very moment.

Our freestanding article in this issue is Jill Jensen's "From Geneva to the Americas: The International Labor Organization and Inter-American Social Security Standards, 1936–1948." Looking at a moment of pan-American dialogue on social security and labor standards, especially between Latin Americans and North Americans, this essay also contributes to *ILWCH's* aim to present cross-national and comparative history. In the Reviews section, Keith Mann considers new books that reexamine the history of France in 1968 by looking at the working-class protests that began in the provinces several years earlier.

Our forthcoming issues will include *ILWCH* 81, a special issue on global commodities, edited by Mae Ngai and Mary Nolan, *Classics Revisited*, and *Reports from the Field*; and *ILWCH* 82, our Fortieth Anniversary Issue.

With this issue, we also say goodbye to Allison Miller, who has been our managing editor for the last two years. She has held much of the operation together at Rutgers, dealing with all managing aspects of the journal. We offer her not only our hearty and gracious thanks but best wishes as she completes her doctoral work.

Carolyn Brown, Jennifer Klein and Peter Winn
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