Soldiers of Labor

Soldiers of Labor is the first systematic comparison of the labor policies of the Nazi dictatorship and New Deal America. The main subject of the book is the Reich Labor Service (Reichsarbeitsdienst), a public works project that provided work and education for young men. Here, the organizational setup, the educational dimension, and its practical work are extensively examined. Originally, the institution was an instrument in the fight against unemployment at the end of the Weimar Republic. After 1933, it became a Nazi propaganda tool that ultimately became involved in the Nazi war of extermination. This study examines the similarities and differences, mutual perceptions, and transfers between the Reich Labor Service and its New Deal equivalent, the Civilian Conservation Corps. Patel uncovers stunning similarities between the two organizations, as well as President Roosevelt’s personal irritation with the Nazi equivalent of his pet agency, the CCC.

Kiran Klaus Patel is Assistant Professor of History at Humboldt University, Berlin. The German edition of this book was awarded the Prix de la Fondation Auschwitz (Brussels) and the Tiburtius Recognition Prize (Berlin).
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Soldiers of Labor
Labor Service in Nazi Germany and New Deal America, 1933–1945

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GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE
Washington, D.C.
and

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Preface

“It was so difficult to gain insight into the Reichsarbeitsdienst” – this line from Uwe Johnson’s *Jahrestage* applies also to my work. Many people and institutions helped me as I prepared this study, and it is my great pleasure to be able to thank them here.

This book was originally published in German under the title “Soldaten der Arbeit”: Arbeitsdienste in Deutschland und den USA 1933–1945. The English-language edition would not have been possible without the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C. I am very grateful to Christof Mauch, the director of the GHI, for his interest in having “Soldaten der Arbeit” translated into English and for his support. I would also like to thank the GHI’s in-house editors, David Lazar and Jonathan Skolnik, for their help in preparing the English manuscript for publication. It was a pleasure to work with Thomas Dunlap, who translated the German text into English. For weeks, hardly a day passed without an exchange of emails between Belmont, Massachusetts, and Berlin. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Frank Smith of Cambridge University Press and the two anonymous readers who reviewed the German edition of this work for the Press.

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A great number of helpful staff members assisted me in the archives and libraries where I conducted the research for this book. One learned punster at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, alluding to a famous novel by Hermann Hesse, asked if I found myself “Unterm Rad” (“beneath the wheel” or “under the weight of the Reichsarbeitsdienst [RAD]”); I am very grateful to him and his colleagues for making sure that I did not end up “Unterm Rad.” I owe special thanks to Eugene Morris, who always had an open ear for my questions; many of my thoughts about the CCC were inspired by our conversations.

This book is dedicated to those who have helped me in every conceivable way: my parents, my brother Martin, and, especially, Christina and our daughter, Nina Asmita. Thanks to them, I can once again look beyond the Arbeitsdienst.

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Soldiers of Labor
Originally published in 2005, Soldiers of Labor is a systematic comparison between the labor policies of the Nazi dictatorship and New Deal America. The main subject of the book is the Nazi Labor Service (Reichsarbeitsdienst), a public work scheme that provided work and education for young men. Here, the organizational setup, the educational dimension, and its practical work are extensively examined. Originally, the institution was an instrument in the fight against unemployment at the end of the Weimar Republic. Soldiers of Labor is the first systematic comparison of the labor policies of the Nazi dictatorship and New Deal America. The main subject of the book is the Reich Labor Service (Reichsarbeitsdienst), a public works project that provided work and education for young men. Here, the organizational setup, the educational dimension, and its practical work are extensively examined. Originally, the institution was an instrument in the fight against unemployment at the end of the Weimar Republic. "Soldiers of Labor is a welcome addition to the growing body of literature in the field of transnational history. It sets remarkably high standards regarding methods of historical comparison." - The Journal of American History, Olaf Stieglitz, University of Cologne Colgne, Germany. "Patel's meticulous study of the Reichsarbeitsdienst and its counterpart in the U.S. deserves a wide readership. It is based on extensive primary source research in more than ten archives on both sides of the Atlantic."