Soldiers in Capitalist Society:
Critique of the Labour of Political Violence

by

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Abstract

This dissertation critiques the soldier in capitalist society as a category of social labour that produces the state capacity for political violence. Identifying soldiering labour is essential to historicizing how this social capacity of labouring people is fetishized as the military power of the state. From the perspective of this project, the substance of the labour of the soldier is affected but not resolved by a resolution of form (such as the standing army, or transition from a draft to an all-volunteer army). What is discovered through historical and theoretical analysis and soldiers' struggles themselves, is that historical class struggles in the military can be read as contests for political sovereignty over the labour of political violence: literal power over cooperative labour, not merely over institutions, or freedom in the 'spheres' of politics and economics. It captures the necessity of emancipation in one as a condition of the emancipation of the other; and that of the soldier as a condition for everyone else's so long as we are to be concerned with the entirety of human life and not the exception of a single nation-state's population.

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Chapter 1
Introduction: Soldiers, Labour, and Capitalism

The sites of 'high politics', the military, the state, and international systems, are premised upon proletarian soldiers' labour. Social scientific, government, and popular discourses tend not to reveal this. Politicians and bureaucrats, enemies and voting constituencies, technologies and geographies all play important parts as variables in these discourses, but low-ranking, enlisted soldiers and their work tend to be taken for granted – at most, perhaps, a crisis of recruitment is a national embarrassment.[1] Ideologically, soldiers are for the most part assumed to be a part of the constitutional form of the state.[2] Wars, the work of soldiers, appear trans-historically comparable; military matters are ultimately treated as ones of technical expertise rather than conflictual politics, and far away from the politics of labour, class, and socialism.

The soldier is a contradictory entity and heterogeneous category. Historically, this category of people was definitionally central to war and the state and empire: subjugating Indigenous populations, putting down slave and colonial uprisings, or combating other armies, producing epochal events in world history.[3] This is the lawful or constitutional role of soldiers, the executors of the legitimate use of force for the state against external threats and enemies. In this respect, they are often taken for granted in 'mainstream' histories and theories.

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[1] Harvey M. Sapolsky et al., *US Defense Politics: The Origins of Security Policy* (Routledge, 2014), 74–92.

[2] "Constitutionalism is a globally distributed practice of depoliticisation that appears as the regulation of governance and the structuration of formal political and legal institutions. Constitutional law institutionalises the depoliticisation of the capitalist state, typically by restricting the legislative pursuit of legal or institutional change." Rob Hunter, "Marx's Critique and the Constitution of the Capitalist State," in *Research Handbook on Law and Marxism*, ed. Paul O'Connell and Umut Özsu (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), 190.

[3] As Nanopolous notes, such events are also crucial to studies of revolution: "neither have wars nor emergencies been invariably associated with conservative and imperial practices. Many revolutions sprung out of the ashes of war or repression, even if few were ultimately successful. The Paris Commune of 1871 emerged out of the long siege of Paris and the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. The Russian Revolution was fuelled by the inter-imperial rivalries that defined the post-1848 revolutionary period and the autocratic policies of the tsarist regime." Eva Nanopoulos, "To Embrace or To Reject: Marxism and the 'War-Emergency Paradigm,'" in *Marxism and the Capitalist State: Towards a New Debate*, ed. Rob Hunter, Rafael Khachaturian, and Eva Nanopoulos (Springer International Publishing, 2023) 143. Furthermore, in both the Paris Commune and Russian Revolution, soldiers themselves played the part of revolutionaries.

Historically, soldiers were also central to the development of capitalism. The process of original expropriation or "so-called primitive accumulation"[4], separating the means of reproduction from production, required organized violence against peasants and pre-capitalist institutions of social life in Europe and globally.[5] Militaries were enlisted for disciplining labouring populations and enforcing the new criminal laws of capitalist society. These historical origins of capitalism too required military manpower, but historically and theoretically this manpower tends to be taken for granted as well.[6]

This project takes a historical materialist approach to this topic. I take this approach because the political horizon that orients this work is emancipation conceived of in the sense originated by Karl Marx. While certainly soldiering-labour could be studied from other theoretical-methodological approaches, for me, the object is meaningful because I take this historical materialist approach which, unlike other approaches, is interested in seeing the antagonisms of the capitalist system and its political forms. Other approaches perhaps do not need to explain this topic because their conceptualizations and philosophies of society and political life do not make the labour of political violence apparent as a problem. Throughout the chapters I will flag points of difference between mine and other possible approaches in matters of interpretation of events or concepts. The lacuna of interest within historical materialism, broadly understood, is much more

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[4] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin Books, 1981), 871 –940.

[5] 'Social' encompasses what we distinguish as separate spheres or functions: the economic and political. On the political and the economic as a contradictory unity: "The fragmentation of the economic and political, as well as the historical composition of their interrelation, is only real as a process of class struggle." Werner Bonefeld, "Social Constitution and the Form of the Capitalist State," in *Open Marxism. 1: Dialectics and History*, ed. Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, and Kosmas Psychopedis (Pluto Press, 1992), 98. See also: Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism," *New Left Review* 1, no. 127 (1981): 66–95.; Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations* (Verso, 1994); Tony Smith, *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism: Marx and Normative Social Theory in the Twenty-First Century* (Brill, 2017), 187–91. For an explicit engagement with the separation of spheres as a normative good in Habermas, Weber, and others, see: Smith *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism*, 41–44, 69–70.

[6] With some exceptions, for example: Peter Way, "Class-Warfare: Primitive Accumulation, Military Revolution and the British War-Worker," in *Beyond Marx: Theorising the Global Labour Relations of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Marcel van der Linden and Karl Heinz Roth (Brill, 2014), 65–87.; Heide Gerstenberger, *Impersonal Power: History and Theory of the Bourgeois State* (Brill, 2007); Heide Gerstenberger*, Market and Violence: The Functioning of Capitalism in History* (Brill, 2022).

puzzling to me. My approach to historical materialism shows how the antagonisms of capitalist social relations shape the form of soldier-labour, how the soldier-labourer might join a struggle against capitalism and its political forms, and why historical materialist scholarship should pay the labour at the heart of the capitalist state's power more attention.

Marxist theories of capitalism as impersonal rule or mute compulsion seem to render the military unimportant to theorise, a universal institution whose meaning is transparent and not necessitating great analytic attention – soldiers are a part of the nation-state. These theories unintentionally adopt the state's constitutional perspective, though sometimes with a normative inversion.[7] An omission of the international altogether, or an effective omission through deference to realist assumptions is also common.[8] In well-ordered liberal capitalism, soldiers are neither a revolutionary subject nor a primary antagonist. In authoritarian capitalism, they are executors of orders, perhaps reactionary partisans. In imperialism, neo-colonialism, and fascism, they have been unambiguous upholders of repression and direct antagonists of socialists and working people. The state's violence is, for much of the history of Marxist thought, the major obstacle in the last instance and always a reality to be strategized around, assessed, and reckoned with politically. This is intensely so during revolutionary struggle. The state often looms as leviathan – whether conceptualized as the managing committee of the bourgeoisie, as terrain of struggle, or the political form of capitalist social relations.[9] The Marxist tradition also inveighs against fetishism; the commodity itself obscures ecological exploitation and labouring activity channelled into production. So, why do we

[7] To generalize, there are strains of left-wing thinking that have a base-line critique of the state's repressive apparatus, but also those that identify strongly with the state, particularly the post-war welfare state.

[8] Rosenberg enumerates the many reasons for Realist-Marxist incommensurability, including the IR premises of a separate international realm, and the state as the nearly exclusive bearer of international political agency: Justin Rosenberg, "What's the Matter with Realism?" *Review of International Studies* 16, no. 04 (October 1990): 285. See also Bonefeld on the importance of the international and global perspective: "'Cutting struggle down to the national level as the basic, given unit of the inter-national order coerces the global character of this struggle, divides it in the form of competing territorial units, and thus treats them as competing factors of production that can also be called upon as a military resource." Werner Bonefeld, "Global Capital, National State, and the International," *Critique* 36, no. 1 (April 2008): 72.

[9] A generalization of three prominent modes of Marxist state theorizing today: Leninist, Poulantzian, and social form. For the latter, see: Simon Clarke, *The State Debate* (Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2016), 183.

so often, even in our critique of the institutions of politics and government, leave the labour of state violence mystified? What are we missing by leaving the soldier in a black box?

Soldiers *do* need explaining. Not only is the state repressive apparatus historically meaningful as the prosecutor of great power politics par excellence, we actually do need to explain this phenomenon that appears to be transparently about hard power, geopolitics, and coercion. How are people available for this type of work? Why does the 'soldier' exist as a concept and a role? What is specifically capitalist about soldiering? This dissertation reveals things about modern forms of social and political power which we could never see so long as we take the soldier herself for granted as a basic component of social reality: a deeper understanding of labour, of the characteristics of class struggle, of what the military is, and of historical and contemporary political terrain. I do so via the category of labour.

In capitalism, state policies are "radically indeterminate"; as Tony Smith puts it regarding the military specifically, sometimes armed forces have been directed towards particular economic benefits, while at others another geopolitical logic has superseded predictably perverse economic costs.[10] Rejecting an instrumentalist reading of the capitalist state does not mean that there are not capitalist characteristics of the state: labour is an underutilized lens of state theorizing. Labour has a dual character, abstract and concrete. It is precisely a capitalist phenomenon, though it appears to be transhistorical because the concrete element is what is apparent to the naked eye: the conscious, active combination of mind and body to transform nature. Labour is a capitalist form that shapes, reciprocally, the state, itself the political form of capitalist social relations.

Proceeding from this premise, I investigate the soldier to demystify and critique the labour(s) of political violence of the capitalist state. Militaries are organizations formed out of and alongside capitalist social relations of historical and ongoing expropriation, exploitation, mediations of racialization and gender, and 'free' markets of labour. I look at change over time in the centres of capitalist power by looking at soldier labour as a site of class struggle, showing how the state neutralized this politics and mystified its power in a particular historical circumstance at the end

[10] Smith *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism*, 184.

of the 20th century, such that the historical breadth of the *left-wing* soldier no longer exists even as a popular memory in the left and labour movements of the advanced capitalist states. Guiding this inquiry is a political understanding of the working-class soldier in the capitalist state as an exemplar of the broader feature of capitalist life which implicates the multi-racial, global, working class in the exploitation and domination of nature, self and class. How soldiering-labour is organized socially and within militaries is a question of political power with implications for class rule and self-emancipation. How the soldier-revolutionary dialectic is resolved is the question of revolution itself.

1.1 The Labour of Political Violence

Soldiers may provide a variety of concrete activities, or use-values, varying across historical time and space, from construction and engineering, to medicine, to fighting and killing. These serve a variety of political functions: policing, intelligence and surveillance, combat, conquest, and occupation, to be applied domestically or internationally. As Göran Therborn writes, along with "violent repression and ideological indoctrination" the state's functions also include: "economic penetration of other countries and restriction of access to the national territory; stimulation of economic development; and management of cyclical fluctuations."[11] Many of these activities reproducing capitalist social relations are what we may call *indirectly* or structurally violent functions; particularly internationally, "the state does not directly reproduce class relations, but defends the conditions of their reproduction."[12] Overall, however, any military's primary function is the capacity to exercise *direct* violence or coercive force, even though soldiers are frequently called upon for work tasks that do not obviously necessitate military training.[13] In theory, non-

[11] Göran Therborn, *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules? State Apparatuses and State Power Under Feudalism, Capitalism and Socialism* (Verso, 2008), 72.

[12] Therborn, *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?*, 94.

[13] Indeed, concerns with "non-military issues" are often reframed as military or security issues, not without political consequence. Emily Gilbert, "The Militarization of Climate Change," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 11, no. 1 (2012): 1–14. The broad international relations literature on "securitization" partially encompasses this, although the originators of such (Ole Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization," in *On Security*, ed. Ronnie Lipschutz (Columbia University Press, 1995), 46–86.; Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner, 1998)) and in this lineage focus specifically on speech acts versus "objective" threat assessment.

primary activities could certainly undermine effectiveness or military readiness,[14] and there are many political and organizational reasons why a military might more regularly engage in activities for secondary purposes (particularly in a post-welfare state configuration).[15] These non-combat duties of non-traditional 'security' are not all novel to the 21st century. To name but one example, in the early 20th century, soldiers served as proto-park rangers in Yosemite national park in the U.S.[16]

The primary output of the military production process is the capacity for state coercive force or power.[17] This force can be applied in defensive, offensive, or deterrent ways. Power can be divided

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[14] U.S. DOD' defines readiness as "the ability of military forces to fight and meet the demands of assigned missions." But, like much defence terminology, it has flexible applicability and capaciousness. See: 'Readiness' in Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms," (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (.mil), 2017).

[15] For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Canadian Armed Forces provided labour (at no cost to the often private firms) to 'besieged' (to use the language of the Canadian press) long-term care facilities, "helping residents with day-to-day needs, cleaning the facilities and meal distribution". Murray Brewster and Vassy Kapelos, "Military Alleges Horrific Conditions, Abuse in Pandemic-Hit Ontario Nursing Homes," *CBC News*, May 26, 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/long-term-care-pandemic-covid-coronavirus-trudeau-1.5584960; Murray Brewster, "Military Mission to COVID-Hit Long Term Care Homes Cost Taxpayers about $53 Million," *CBC News*, November 16, 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/covid-pandemic-coronavirus-canadian-armed-forces-1.5804063. They are regularly deployed to sites of natural disasters: "We are trained to fight the enemy and right now the enemy is fire, in whatever form it takes." "The Mop Up Crew: Canadian Armed Forces Members Support Wildfire Firefighting in Alberta," Canada.ca May 18, 2023, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/news/regional-news/western-sentinel/2023/05/the-mop-up-crew.html. Though this approach for firefighting has been questioned with 2023's unprecedented wildfires. David P. Ball, "Why Doesn't Canada Have a National Wildfire-Fighting Force?" *CBC News*, August 12, 2023, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/national-wildfire-fighting-force-canada-1.6925785.

[16] Harvey Meyerson, *Nature's Army: When Soldiers Fought for Yosemite*, (University Press of Kansas, 2020). The role of constructing 'natural' environments as a classic feature of settler colonialism and not at all apart from the frontier wars despite the direct bloodlessness of the concrete activities under discussion. Liam Midzain-Gobin, *Settler Colonial Sovereignty: Visions of Improvement and Indigenous Erasure*, (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2025).; Mark Spence, "Dispossessing the Wilderness: Yosemite Indians and the National Park Ideal, 1864-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 1 (1996): 27–59.; Isaac Kantor, "Ethnic Cleansing and America's Creation of National Parks Ethnic Cleansing and America's Creation of National Parks," *Public Land & Resources Law Review* 28 (June 2007): 41–64; René Dietrich, "Made to Move, Made of This Place: 'Into America', Mobility, and the Eco-Logics of Settler Colonialism," *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 61, no. 4 (2016): 507–25; Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 387–409.

[17] In scholarship concerning contemporary militaries and their activities, there is considerable literature on what rich/advanced capitalist/First World/Global North countries militaries are "for" politically. For an example regarding Europe, see: Timothy Edmunds, "What Are Armed Forces for? The Changing Nature of Military Roles in Europe," *International Affairs* 82, no. 6 (November 2006): 1059–75. This goes hand-in-hand with the reorganization of said militaries post-Cold War. For one account see: Aaron Ettinger, "Ending the Draft in America: The Coevolution of

in two ways here to distinguish the soldier's role: the power of direction and decision/authority on the one hand, and on the other, the execution of power. Ordinary soldiers are hierarchically excluded from the political design of their workplaces: the high-level political-military strategy and aims or 'ends' that are 'outward-facing' towards other states, non-state actors, allies, and adversaries. They are also excluded from the design of the labour requirements of military activities that puts political designs into action: military doctrine (offensive, defensive, deterrent) or 'means', including force posture, the operational strategy, tactics, operations, administration, or internal-facing decisions of how the military and its infinite sub-organizations will endeavor to achieve those high-level aims as well as reproduce itself. In the chain of command, the soldier's power is concentrated as an executor of orders. 'Means' and 'ends' can also be understood as necessitating "efficient" and "effective" labour, respectively.[18] Efficiency describes the skills and abilities to carry out operations (daily and exceptional) smoothly, with an ideal amount of time and effort. Effectiveness is the achievement of a desired "end" or result. One can efficiently carry out all manner of essential activities and tasks that comprise soldiering work without the military objectives being achieved.[19] Command needs efficient soldier labour to be militarily effective, but the former is not sufficient to achieve the latter.

Comparable to how the factory worker applies their labour-power to the means of production to produce commodities determined by the capitalist and ordered by their manager, the soldier likewise applies their labour-power with weapons of war, or other tools, to produce the outcome instructed to them from their commanding officer according to superiors all the way up their hierarchy atop which sits (theoretically) the direction of the government. The military in many ways preceded industry as the place of complex bureaucratic organization, and this is why it

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Military Manpower and the Capitalist State, 1948–1973," *Critical Military Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 1–16; "Neoliberalism and the Rise of the Private Military Industry." *International Journal* 66, no. 3 (2011): 743–64.

[18] David Cortright and Max Watts, *Left Face: Soldier Unions and Resistance Movements in Modern Armies* (Greenwood Press, 1991), 102–103.

[19] Cortright and Watts *Left Face*, 102–103.

recurrently served as a helpful point of analogy for Marx.[20] This is the primary role of soldiers: the application of labour-power, that is, their mental and physical *selves*, as directed.[21] As will be discussed in chapter two, the form and the content of the labour are not separable; in capitalist society, labour is shaped by capitalism's particular social relations.

"Soldiers join the Army to soldier," said Lt. Gen. George Forsythe to the *Army Times*.[22] However, soldiers have always engaged in a wide range of other labour activities, whether for daily reproduction (feeding oneself and others, cleaning barracks- or camp-households), infrastructural production and maintenance, and so on. Due to the vast range of types of work involved in soldiering labour, the question of individual ethical objection to committing direct harm to others does not suffice to explore the involvement of working-class struggle in military work. The violent component of the work therefore requires elaboration beyond its uniqueness as a site of moral injury.[23] Historically, the soldier form has varied (forced, conscripted, volunteer, mercenary), shifting political claims about military labour, particularly critiques oriented around the

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[20] Jasmine Chorley-Schulz, "Soldiers and the State in Marx and Engels," in *Marxism and the Capitalist State: Towards a New Debate*, ed. Rob Hunter, Rafael Khachaturian, and Eva Nanopoulos (Springer International Publishing, 2023), 121–39.

[21] Exploring the many explanations of military strategy, doctrine, tactics, grand strategy, foreign policy are well outside the scope of this project. I should flag the debates' existence however as they are a part of the general debates and perspectives on state behaviour. For example, in his classic text, Posen lays out two schools, organization theories and balance of power theories, with widespread purchase in security studies, the former focusing on large, functionally specialized bureaucracies and the latter referring to sovereign political units (states) in conditions of anarchy (the international system). Neither are ultimately compatible with a Marxist theory of the state and society, but the literatures in both broadly understood 'schools' are nevertheless useful to Marxist theories within limits. Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), 34–35.

[22] Robert K. Griffith, "The U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force, 1968- 1974" (Center of Military History United States Army, 1997), 76. Hiring civilians to do "non-soldier duties" was a major reform of the early 1970s. "Freeing soldiers from KP, post clean-up details and grass cutting would give them back to the sergeants, he said. The result would be more training. Furthermore, he added, units would be able to train at full strength. His program intended to "free the soldier of non-soldier duties."

[23] See, for example: Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Combat Trauma: Imaginaries of War and Citizenship in Post-9/11 America*, (Verso, 2022).; Christian Enemark, "Drones, Risk, and Moral Injury," *Critical Military Studies* 5, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 150–67.; Kenneth MacLeish, "Moral Injury and the Psyche of Counterinsurgency," *Theory, Culture & Society* 39, no. 6 (September 2021).; Tine Molendijk et al., "Contextual Dimensions of Moral Injury: An Interdisciplinary Review," *Military Psychology* 34, no. 6 (November 2, 2022): 742–53.; Jelena Subotic and Brent J. Steele, "Moral Injury in International Relations," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 3, no. 4 (October 1, 2018): 387–401.

importance of individual free will.[24] As industry developed capitalism, infantry and artillery became the decisive means of war, being produced industrially and also for the advantage of the bourgeoisie over the nobility; the effect on military labour was the emergent need for engineering corps, "a new and entirely industrial subsection" of military work.[25] Repair and maintenance of industrial arms demanded new skills of the soldiering workforce. Writing on the U.S. military in after the Civil War (1861-1865), for example, Greene writes,

> Common labor dominated the everyday lives of soldiers as they worked toward the goals of expansionist capitalism: constructing and maintaining forts, roads, and bridges, chopping wood, cutting hay, gardening, laying telegraph wire, surveying land, and fighting drought or blizzards. A judge in 1884 undoubtedly captured the impression shared by many soldiers when he referred to military service as *"the drudgery of a common laborer."* When enlisted men's wives followed them to their posts, they typically found work as launderesses or domestic servants. [26]

Even non-combat activities with civilian equivalents in their concrete form, such as engineering or daily reproduction, are nevertheless in the *military* setting directed toward the production of coercive force for the achievement of political aims: "labor of pacification and domination, suppressing uprisings, disciplining others' labor, depriving certain groups of their land or

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[24] This can be answered in part by conscription or by voluntarism, and in part by all manner of disciplinary processes. But even in the case of compulsory service, the question still remains: how should someone accept this demand upon them? Studies on motivations for joining are, unsurprisingly, more prevalent in volunteer or professional armies than in conscripted armies; countries with conscripted armies tend to have more data on motivation for refusal or selective refusal. In Israel, for example, conscientious objection based on pacifism and/or objection to the occupation are prominent as phenomena and as a research subject. See: Yulia Zemlinskaya, "Between Militarism and Pacifism: Conscientious Objection and Draft Resistance in Israel," *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 2, no. 1 (May 2008): 9–35.; Erica Weiss, *Conscientious Objectors in Israel: Citizenship, Sacrifice, Trials of Fealty* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). A 2018 RAND study reported motivations for joining the U.S. Army were (from most to fewest respondents): Adventure/travel (32), [welfare] benefits (25), "call to serve" (20), job stability and/or pay (19), leave negative home and/or hometown environment (17), job training (13), family history [of military service] (11), MOS guarantee (10), honor and/or respect (9), always dreamt of it (9), opportunities (4), discipline/structure (3), other (18). Todd C., S. Helmus et al., "Life as a Private: A Study of the Motivations and Experiences of Junior Enlisted Personnel in the U.S. Army," (RAND Corporation, 2018), 27.

[25] "With the defeat of the nobility's armour-clad cavalry, the nobility's supremacy was broken; with the development of the bourgeoisie, infantry and artillery became more and more the decisive types of arms; compelled by the development of artillery, the military profession had to add to its organization a new and entirely industrial subsection, the corps of engineers." Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 231.

[26] Julie Greene, "The Wages of Empire: Capitalism, Expansionism, and Working-Class Formation," in *Making the Empire Work: Labor and United States Imperialism*, ed. Daniel E. Bender and Jana K. Lipman (New York University Press, 2015), 43.

possessions, ending empires or dreams of independence, propping up friendly regimes, and when necessary, engaging in the labor of killing."[27] These are all the actions of *political* objectives designed by *others*: to control a place, resources, or people for the enrichment, advantage, or benefit (financially or politically) of another.

1.2 Why Soldiers in Capitalist Society?

Why look at the soldier in particular and not just the military? First, the soldier precisely represents the convergence of structural and direct power. Many job categories make the military's functions possible, and many tasks have been restructured and moved between military and civilian job categories over time. But the soldier is defined conceptually by the discharge of violent power itself. Second, the soldier originates from the proletariat, working or subaltern classes. This presents an apparent contradiction connected to the capitalist state; the working class is dominated economically and thereby politically, but as soldiers they are tasked with the perpetuation of class domination worldwide. We may imagine soldiers to be the political inverse of the international working-class subject of the 19th and 20th century represented in the famous final declaration of *The Communist Manifesto*: "Working Men of All Countries, Unite!"[28]

Unite or fight? In a capitalist state, the soldier's role is to ensure the reproduction of capitalist social relations of which the state is the political form. A soldier originating from the proletarian population who must sell their labour for a living therefore functions in contradiction to her 'objective' class interests, in that she abets in the reproduction of her class oppression, through the degradation of her body in labour (and potentially violence) in pursuit of reproducing her objective physical self (alongside the pursuit of other desires and needs). Crucially, the class hierarchy entailed by value-accumulation is global. The soldier is furthermore, through the *object* of her work – political violence, a participant in the perpetuation of capitalist social relations in the domination of colonial and oppressed peoples exploited (in land or labour) by imperial states and capital. We see this apparent contradiction in even starker terms among racialized soldiers whose

[27] Greene, "The Wages of Empire," 43.

[28] For an essential discussion on cultural imaginaries of labour and the working class, see Michael Denning, "Representing Global Labor," *Social Text* 25, no. 3 (2007): 125–45.

work reproduces the state and international system which are governed in part by the colour line, even though the problem of international governance is no longer spoken about in the explicit terms of "race subjugation", except in genocidal circumstances.[29]

Soldiers are not the only or most important workers who do what they do. Much of this dissertation will be relevant to the study of the police, for example, as well as other state employees engaged in violent work, or other similar functions. What makes soldiers specific and distinguishable? Partly it is ideological: the soldier *means* something different in our society than the police officer does, or the firefighter, or the revolutionary insurgent, or the mafioso. This ideology is recursively constructed with state institutions, including law and the military itself. Institutions of national states and of international law define and grant special duties and rights to soldiers of state armies. There is also a material specificity: soldiers *do* specific things in political life; money and resources are directed towards these activities and soldiers receive money; soldiers have specific experiences in their recruitment, training, education, discipline, professional lives, psychological and medical hazards, cultural, sexual, racial and gendered embodiment.[30] Soldiers represent legitimated political violence in capitalist society. Identifying their *labour* is essential to historicizing it: that political violence in capitalist society is made by a segment of the labouring class, which is drawn from historical class relations and exploitation and attendant ideologies all located within the context of an international division of labour, fetishized as the military power of the state.

1.3 Scope

I look at soldiers of the military of the capitalist state form. Capitalist militaries have taken a variety of organizational forms (militias, standing armies, mercenary armies, navies, local and territorial,

[29] "In the first decades of the twentieth century in the United States, international relations meant race relations. … The problem of empire or imperialism, sometimes referred to as "race subjugation", was what preoccupied the hirst self-identified professors of international relations. They wrestled with the prospect that a race war might lead to the end of the world hegemony of whites, a future that appeared to many to be in the offing." Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Cornell University Press, 2015), 1. On immigration and the intersection of race, class, and gender in the military: Cristina-Ioana Dragomir, *Making the Immigrant Soldier: How Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Gender Intersect in the US Military* (UI Press, 2023).

[30] Value in capitalist society separates and distinguishes via money different instances of labour – the fact of payment makes work a specific kind of experience.

expeditionary and international, defensive and imperial).[31] Relatedly, they have likewise varied in how their violence-labour is organized, represented, and compensated: soldiers can be conscripted, coerced, enslaved, and even unionized (see chapter five). This is before we then consider the diversity of historical time from early capitalism to present-day and place.

This dissertation focuses on the soldiers of states at the forefront of capital accumulation. This is in order to focus on the military institutions and states with greatest power and who most clearly play roles of domination in the international division of labour, rather than armed forces with unrealized ambitions to sovereignty or national independence from formal or neo-colonial empires. The point of this is to look at the soldiers implicated in less ambiguously repressive and reactionary institutions: armies that are *not* a part of revolutionary struggles and are antagonistic to the politics of revolution and therefore pose a distinct set of problems to the revolutionary international working class.[32] European states in the 18th and 19th century, such as Britain, France, and Germany, are discussed (chapter three) as context for the development of militia debates alongside the development of capitalism. The United States is a focus in chapters four

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[31] In organizational terms, I decided to exclude official police forces. This is a practical scoping decision but not an unproblematic one: police conceptually and often organizationally emerged out of military forms in many places, their tasks of work have and continue to overlap, and institutionally there is a high degree of interdependence economically and when it comes to international training and collaboration. (See for example: the work of Julian Go, "The Imperial Origins of American Policing: Militarization and Imperial Feedback in the Early 20th Century," *American Journal of Sociology* 125, no. 5 (March 1, 2020): 1193–1254; Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American* (University of California Press, 2019); Joël Glasman and Michelle R. Moyd, "Military and Police," in *General Labour History of Africa: Workers, Employers and Governments, 20th–21st Centuries*, ed. Andreas Eckert and Stefano Bellucci (Boydell & Brewer, 2019), 333–60.; R. Reiner, "The Police in the Class Structure," *British Journal of Law and Society* 5, no. 2 (1978): 166–84.; Kirsten Weld, "Police Work, Unbounded," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 97 (2020): 197–201.) Indeed, it is a much more active and long-standing field of political theoretic study in many ways, especially from critical and radical social and political theorists. (See: Nica Seigel, "Violence Work: Policing and Power," *Race & Class* 59, no. 4 (April 1, 2018): 15–33.; *Violence Work: State Power and the Limits of Police*. Durham : London: Duke University Press, 2018.; Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson, *Genealogies of Terrorism: Revolution, State Violence, Empire* (Columbia University Press, 2018).; Markus Dirk Dubber, *The Police Power: Patriarchy and the Foundations of American Government* (Columbia University Press, 2005).; Alex Gourevitch, "Police Work: The Centrality of Labor Repression in American Political History," *Perspectives on Politics* 13, no. 3 (September 2015): 762–73.) There is certainly a version of this dissertation that may have focused more narrowly thematically or historically, in exchange for encompassing the full spectrum of state violence work. Indeed, the ideological-conceptual difference might be the most significant one for distinguishing between police and military. In chapter three I emphasize the ideological stakes of the form of the standing army versus militia as partly what makes the definition meaningful to different groups.

[32] As discussed at the end of chapter 3, state socialism raises similar but politically different sets of problems when it comes to organizing the labour of state violence and needs to be approached differently.

and five. As the dominant state power of the 20th century, the U.S. is where working-class soldiers' political opposition to capitalism, imperialism and racism would find their strongest challenge. Indeed, it was an unwitting vector for the global soldiers' labour movement, as U.S. soldiers were not only experiencing war and empire (in combat and on global bases) but developing relationships with other radical soldiers in European countries where they were stationed. One of those countries, the Netherlands, is also paid particular attention (chapter five) for the Dutch soldiers movement's many successes in that country and as a model for U.S. soldiers. The other country that is paid specific attention in this dissertation differs greatly from the others: the nascent Soviet Union (chapter three). This case establishes in concrete terms the post-revolutionary question that comes out of a critique of the capitalist state: what kind of armed force would a transitional socialist state require? The major theorists and leaders of the Soviet Union as well as activist soldiers and workers furiously debated this question with both normative and international-realist dimensions in real time.

In this sense, this project begins from a strategic political question: what is to be done about the violent power of the state? But also, it starts from a normative and existential imperative: if we look toward a horizon of disengagement from an imperial mode of living[33] we have to rethink the material power underlying political theories of the state across the political spectrum. What is achieved from that starting point is a greater understanding that capitalism enlists people in the domination of self, other, and nature. What is discovered through historical and theoretical analysis, but more importantly through soldiers' struggles themselves, is that historical class struggles in the military are ultimately contests for political sovereignty over the labour of political violence.

1.4 Importance

Institutional economics sees the state's repressive or 'defense' or 'security' apparatus as a 'public good': "it is impossible to exclude those who do not want to pay" and "the demand of one person

[33] Ulrich Brand, Markus Wissen, and Zachary Murphy King, *The Imperial Mode of Living: Everyday Life and the Ecological Crisis of Capitalism* (Verso Books, 2021).

for the good does not diminish the possibilities to consume for another person."[34] Indeed, the moral problem is precisely this: the capitalist state produces such effects on the world in the course of global class struggle, that all citizens are implicated in and may (unevenly) benefit from it – such as through lower prices or conveniences of consumer goods, state services, infrastructure, technologies, and sciences. Capitalism implicates us all as social individuals in our own oppression as well as the oppression and exploitation of others and nature. The primary way we are implicated in these structural violences is through our participation in the circuits of capital, first and foremost, our labour but also our consumption of commodities required in capitalism to reproduce ourselves. In an understanding of the structural or impersonal violence of capital[35], of expropriation and dispossession,[36] as well as the banal forms of violence institutionalized in labour processes, law, and insurance[37], and the particularizing overt violence of regimes of race[38] – there are ample ways to identify the prolific violence of capitalism that encompass the 'normal' workings of the system.

This project performs the novel work of understanding the soldier in capitalist society as a category of labour that produces the state capacity of political violence, and critiques the delegation of power to capital's political form and its mystification. Recognizing the soldier as a form of embodied labour ought not to be in the pursuit of a moral recognition of 'contributions' or 'hard work' or 'sacrifice'. Not only does this fetishization prioritize the soldier over the 'enemy' whether

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[34] Simon Duindam, "The Public Good 'Defense,'" in *Military Conscription: An Economic Analysis of the Labour Component in the Armed Forces*, ed. Simon Duindam (Physica-Verlag HD, 1999), 17–34.

[35] Søren Mads Mau. *Mute Compulsion: A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital* (Verso, 2023).; Gerstenberger, *Impersonal Power*.

[36] Jacob Blumenfeld, "Expropriation of the Expropriators," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 49, no. 4 (May 2023): 431–47; Werner Bonefeld, "On the State as Political Form of Society," *Science & Society* 85, no. 2 (April 2021): 177–84.; Sai Englert, "Settlers, Workers, and the Logic of Accumulation by Dispossession," *Antipode* 52, no. 6 (November 2020): 1647–66.

[37] Nate Holdren, *Injury Impoverished: Workplace Accidents, Capitalism, and Law in the Progressive Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); "Social Murder: Capitalism's Systematic and State-Organized Killing," in *Marxism and the Capitalist State: Towards a New Debate*, ed. Rob Hunter, Rafael Khachaturian, and Eva Nanopoulos (Springer International Publishing, 2023), 185–207.

[38] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press, 2007).

combatant or civilian, it also prioritizes the soldier *as a soldier* over the soldier as a member of the international working-class and as a social being.

My contribution in this project is important because it repairs a worn patch in the history of historical materialist thinking about state power, as taking a particular social form that is the result of class struggle for sovereignty of the labour of political violence (chapter three). Furthermore, I take a critical eye to this recovered story and assess its limitations, in part through looking at another episode of struggle in a moderated mode of politics (chapter five). From the perspective of this project, and differing from many of the historical perspectives presented, the substance of the labour of the soldier is affected but not resolved by finding the ideal institutional form or labour arrangement of political violence work. Since the substance of the labour of political violence is the reproduction of capitalist social relations, it is analytically distinguishable but not separate from its forms. The form can only be resolved by the resolution of the substance. Not only does this project recover historical ideas but it also points future research beyond them, toward more utopian horizons.

To achieve this, I begin in chapter two, 'Critique of the Labour of Political Violence', by offering a methodological overview of my approach to historical materialist inquiry and why it is helpful for understanding the soldier and its relationship to capitalism. In it, I will establish key themes of the state and labour as they pertain to the soldier with reference to the theoretical touchstones of my approach centering around "Marx's theory of value as a theory of social domination".[39] I draw upon a wide range of theoretical resources from the Marxist tradition that engage in some way with social form approaches. The result of this orientation is that this project is not a discovery of a socialist or proletarian form of soldier labour but a critique of the labour of political violence and an argument for the abolition of soldier labour as a social form of capitalist relations. Establishing this high-level perspective in chapter two allows these ideas to act as a compass guiding the inquiry in the following chapters.

[39] Chris O'Kane, "Capital, the State, and Economic Policy: Bringing Open Marxist Critical Political Economy Back into Contemporary Heterodox Economics," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 52, no. 4 (December 2020): 684–92.

Chapter three, ‘The Militia Question’, explores the alienation of one of many political functions from the people to the state by using the 18th-century Enlightenment and early socialist (1848-1920) debates on militia-versus-standing-armies as a prism. This chapter takes a long view of the militia question: ideological debates over how to organize the labour of the state’s repressive power for the benefit of ‘national defence’, ‘political economy’, and ‘social order’. This will establish a forgotten lineage from Enlightenment political economists, through Marx and Engels, to the early Soviet Union and German social democrats: the critical adaptation of the bourgeois republican militia tradition for a new revolutionary tradition: the self-emancipation of the international working class. Chapter three thereby reconstructs an unappreciated concern of Marx, Engels, and the first generations of Marxian socialists, including the first attempt after the Paris Commune to answer it in practice in a socialist republic. Furthermore, it establishes that there is yet no settled ‘answer’ to this question, as it hinges upon some of the more controversial questions *among* and *between* Marxists to this day: including the relative democracy or authority within both production and the institutions of a socialist state (transitional or otherwise).

Chapter four, ‘The Soldier and the Structure of Social Reproduction’, shows how rather than disappearing into the state and the other side of the combatant-civilian legal form for the duration of service, the proletarian soldier continues to participate in the daily and generational reproduction of the working-class as whole, along with her participation in the reproduction of the state, capital, and, consequently of all three, capitalist society writ large. The reforms to “kitchen police” – or cooking and cleaning duties – in the U.S. Military in the transition to the all-volunteer force (1968-74) illuminate themes of domination, division of labour, and necessary work. I analyze the specificity of military labor processes and show how class struggle can take place through them. The political particularity of political subject-formation and collectivity cannot be located at this same general level of inquiry. This chapter establishes how we might determine the potential for soldiers in class coalitions in differing circumstances, and the complex of political-material-ideological dynamics at play in not only combat but at the level of daily reproduction.

In chapter five, ‘The Union Question’, we will consider a historical episode of soldiers’ re-imagining of the international working class and the role of their work and life in it. Unionization efforts in the U.S. and the Dutch armed forces in the 1960s-70s were part of an international movement of soldiers asserting themselves as workers and citizens. The union question as

compared to the militia question represents the transformation in the capitalist state and class struggle over centuries in material, political-military, and ideological terms. No longer was the shape of state force up for question in a substantial way; no longer were socialists and radicals interested in actively undermining the military labour force in a comparably subversive manner. As with the militia question, I do not present an assessment of military unionization as a policy prescription or even a prescription for the working-class struggle. I begin with the question of why soldiers might want a union in the abstract, looking at the specificity of the military *labour process* as a place of class conflict and struggle and the broader idea of unionism. A struggle over capitalist-alienation, this episode shows how themes of division of the labour and power in society that were discussed in chapter three and run throughout the dissertation endure in democratic forms of capitalism. I look at concrete campaigns and movements in the U.S. and Netherlands, representing unsuccessful and successful efforts, respectively. In the U.S. especially, government and military elites express in Congress, policy papers, and other texts ideologies of not only soldering, but state power and labour. Soldiers themselves likewise express in their publications, actions, and organizational forms, grappling with the implication of social individuals in the circumstances of their own oppression and the oppression of the international working class and claims on their own labour collectively. This chapter widens our perspective on what may be – or may have been – possible to imagine politically in a time much closer to our own than Marx's time and elaborates upon the co-relation of labour and political struggle.

Chapter six, an epilogue, will offer some parting reflections on the contributions of this project to understanding political life today and a future beyond the capitalist bifurcation of labour and politics.

Chapter 2 Critique of the Labour of Political Violence

2 Soldiers in Capitalist Society

> Labour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transience of things, their temporality, as the process of their formation by living time.
>
> –Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*[1]

Proletarian soldiers' labour is a premise of the military, the state, and international politics as institutions. The conflictual political content of this premise is typically elided in scholarship, policy, and culture.[2] The division of people into classes, however, is not only a state of inequality but a state of domination and exploitation and therefore inherent antagonism, a conflictual, unstable political basis on which to found society.[3] Capitalism bifurcates the political,[4] illegitimately restricting the political sphere and thereby "institutionalising the profound category mistake of treating what is inherently political as a private matter."[5] Not only are 'means' and 'ends' to which soldier's labour is put de-politicized in favour of simplistic understandings of technical expertise, patriotic service, and/or national security ideology, the *form* of the state armed force itself is entirely depoliticized (for example, the form of the standing army, or the subordination of labour to the chain of command, which will be explored in chapters three and five, respectively). The political substance of the class basis of the labour of the state political

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[1] Karl Marx, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 28: Marx 1857-61* (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 286.

[2] Generally speaking, class relations themselves are typically overlooked as political. Even left-liberal or socialist appreciation of class relations as a site of conflict may not extent to 'non-political' state forms, or they may see such class conflict as aberrations or deviations from a norm of (inequitable) harmony.

[3] See, for example, Massimo Modonesi, *The Antagonistic Principle: Marxism and Political Action* (Haymarket Books, 2019).

[4] 'Bifurcation of the political' is Rosenberg's (*The Empire of Civil Society*) phrase that Smith (*Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism*, 187–189) adopts. Rosenberg is specifically focused on the depoliticization of international politics via realist international relations theory.

[5] Smith, *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism*, 189. This Marxian insight is what I see as the foundational connection between Marxist Feminism and state theory and what the frequently separate discourses have to offer one another. The household, the primary site of attention for theorizing and historicizing sex/gender systems (Gayle S. Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Duke University Press, 2012), 33–65.) is, too, de-politicized as the private sphere, with profound consequences.

violence, and the forms that violence takes, are the focus of this project. By leaving soldiers in a black box, safe from critique, we miss out on a deeper understanding of labour, of the characteristics of class struggle, and of historical and contemporary political terrain and forms.

As institutions of capitalist social relations, reproduced on the basis of the dynamic domination, exploitation, and resistance that characterizes class societies, militaries are riven with contradictions and constant change. This means that they are potential sites of class struggle and conflict – potential that is overdetermined in any historical moment by all manner of factors, as in any other sector. Despite appearing to be transparently about hard power, coercion, and geopolitics – and therefore presumably the preserve of political-military elites as decision-makers – the category of labour allows entry into dynamic, contradictory politics of the soldier that are rarely explored in political science scholarship, policy, or culture.[6] This is the task of the dissertation at hand.

2.1 Critique of the Labour of Political Violence

To look at the soldier as an instantiation of labour is to posit the repressive force of the state as, in fact, an instantiation of labour. The relative novelty of putting it in these terms speaks to the prevalence of the mystification of the labour of the state's political violence. This project looks at the soldier in capitalist society first of all as a category of labour that produces the state capacity of political violence; secondly, it proposes a *critique* thereof, encompassing a critique of the violence of the work, the policy ends to which this labour is put, the delegation of power to capital's

[6] While relatively novel in political science and political theory, military labour (combat, civilian, etc.) is an established research program of historians. Social and labour historians (from pluralistic theoretical-political orientations) have produced the most research at the intersection of labour and the military (including but not limited to soldiers) across the world and modes of production. See, for example: Daniel E. Bender, and Jana K. Lipman, eds., *Making the Empire Work: Labor and United States Imperialism* (New York University Press, 2015).; Adam Moore, *Empire's Labor: The Global Army That Supports U.S. Wars* (Cornell University Press, 2019).; Nicholas Mansfield, *Soldiers as Workers: Class, Employment, Conflict and the Nineteenth Century Military* (Liverpool University Press, 2016).; Erik Zürcher, *Fighting for a Living: A Comparative History of Military Labour 1500-2000* (Amsterdam University Press, 2013). See also work in such venues as *International Labor and Working-Class History*, the Labor and Working-Class History Association and its journal *Labor*, and the European Labour History Network has a Military Labour History Working Group. From a different perspective, see: Tine Molendijk and Jori Pascal Kalkman, "Towards a Soldier-Based View in Research on The Military: An Empathetically Critical Approach," *Social Sciences* 12, no. 2 (February 2023): 51.

political form, and its mystification.[7] From the perspective of this project, the substance of the labour of the soldier is affected but not resolved by a resolution of form (such as the standing army, or transition from a draft to an all-volunteer army). The substance of the labour of political violence – the reproduction of capitalist social relations – is analytically distinguishable but not separate from its forms.[8]

In this research I draw upon a wide range of theoretical resources from the Marxist tradition – Marxist Feminism, Open Marxism, form of value theory, and Frankfurt School critical theory – which engage in some way with social form approaches. The social form refers to the form within which things come to acquire a social power in capitalist society.[9] As Simon Clarke explains, this approach is based on the mid-20th century reappraisal of *Capital*, where the theory of the form of value came to be understood as the basis for state theory as much as for economic theory.[10] Social form approaches are not concerned with locating a determinate economic cause for all political phenomena, but rather with interrogating how such spheres are constructed by capitalist social relations of appropriation, exploitation, and domination, and mystified by those same relations in their ideological forms (most importantly for *Capital* itself in political economy as a governing ideological enterprise). As Gillian Rose put it, "Marx follows the path of our experience and shows it to be the path by which specific concrete relations give rise to a formal social reality and to systematic subjective illusion. Both the mental and the social are abstract, and so is the making of

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[7] "[The] critical categories of Marx's understanding of labour – the dual character of abstract and concrete labour" express "the fundamental difference between his value theory and the labour theory of political economy". Michael Lazarus, "The Legacy of Reification: Gillian Rose and the Value-Form Theory Challenge to Georg Lukács," *Thesis Eleven* 157, no. 1 (April 2020): 84. "[The] distinction between abstract and concrete labour, on which the theory of value and of commodity fetishism logically depends…" are the "theoretical foundations for a theory of class conflict or for a Marxian theory of power and the state." Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (Verso, 2014), 45–46. See also: Diane Elson, "The Value Theory of Labour," in *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism* (Verso, 1979), 115–80.

[8] Patrick Murray, "Method," in *The SAGE Handbook of Marxism*, ed. Beverley Skeggs, Sara R. Farris, Alberto Toscano, and Svenja Bromberg (SAGE Publications, 2021).

[9] Simon Clarke, *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology: From Adam Smith to Max Weber* (Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991), 85.

[10] Across contemporary scholarship on and of the Marxist tradition, *Capital* has been re-evaluated as a social and political theoretic work. The stand-out example is: William Clare Roberts, *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

the distinction between them."[11] These differentiated forms can only be understood in their "inter-relationship as differentiated forms of the social relations of capitalist production."[12] The relation between wage labour and capital is a *social* one, involving *inextricably* all these 'spheres' because it is "a relation of exploitation, domination, and ideological struggle" at once.[13] In this dissertation, I refer to the 'political' not only to mean 'pertaining to the state or governance', but to describe relations of social power writ large, including the dynamics therein that are usually divided up into artificially separate categories. The critique of political economy and capitalism aims partly to expose these spheres' separat*ed*ness. The commodity itself mystifies the totality: "the fantastic form of a social relations between things"[14] masks the expression of social relations between human beings, obscuring ecological exploitation and labouring activity channelled into production. It obscures the producer and produces a fetish in their stead.[15]

The concept *soldier* is very much a capitalist form tied to the premises of capitalist social relations. One might object and say that the soldier is a figure that bridges pre-capitalist times with capitalist ones. It might furthermore be tempting to accept at face value transhistorical understandings of the soldier as static and unchanging, naturalizing the historically specific relationships of exploitation, domination, and ideology that constitute their form in capitalist societies.[16] I argue throughout this

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[11] Gillian Rose, "Does Marx Have a Method?" *Thesis Eleven* 168, no. 1 (February 24, 2025): 7. Intriguingly, she writes of Marx's method: "he calls his approach from the abstractions to the whole and back to the whole with its abstraction a 'journey' (the German word is *die Reise*), which is exactly the same as the original Greek meaning of 'method'[meta-hodos]: a path or a journey."

[12] Clarke, *State Debate*, 10.

[13] Clarke, *State Debate*, 9.

[14] Marx, *Capital*, 165. See also: Wood, *Separation of the Economic and the Political*.

[15] Marx (*Capital*, 165) continues to say: "In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore *inseparable from the production of commodities*. As the foregoing analysis has already demonstrated, this fetishism of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them."

[16] For two ideologically differing accounts of the development of the soldier in history, see: Gerstenberger, *Impersonal Power;* Beatrice Heuser, "Who Fights?" in *War: A Genealogy of Western Ideas and Practices* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 218–62.

dissertation that the wage, money, and abstract labour are crucial capitalist forces on the soldier form, as well as the imperial organization of global capitalism (perhaps the most apparent capitalist force in this context). This is why the question of *labour* belongs in the heart of capitalist state theory: the expropriated structure of capitalist class relations underwrites not only the supply of soldiering labour, but also is the engine of production of the means of warfare developed in capitalist society and the imperial, racial, and gendered politics of domination and oppression that structure foreign policy and military organization. In this and more ways, class struggle shapes the state form continuously.[17]

2.1.1 Class Struggle and the State

In a certain sense, the conceptual identity of the soldier with the state and the non-identity of soldiers with the international working-class is obvious when they are actively committing counter-revolutionary violence and identifying with expropriation, exploitation, and domination of oppressed peoples. At the same time, the contemporary image of the average soldier seems to fit our association of 'working class' individuals with dangerous and difficult work, poverty, and limited life opportunities. What to make of this apparent contradiction? What about the *political* working class? Do we need an 'objective' economic class category 'of itself' and a separate political one 'for itself'? Should soldiers be sliced off into a state-repressive or middle-class sub-category?[18]

[17] Bonefeld, *Open Marxism 1*, xix.

[18] Louis Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, Erik Olin Wright, and others made major claims around particularly 'contradictory' classes, namely they were concerned with the 'middle' classes of workers with supervisory roles, professional duties, higher educational qualifications, and/or were public employees in healthcare, education, and other fields that expanded alongside the Cold War welfare states in Europe and North America. Part of the concern driving the debate was the search for the 'revolutionary subject' eluding advanced capitalist countries, and dissatisfaction or disillusionment with the official Leninism of state socialism. These middle classes were troubling this search as they shared characteristics with industrial workers but often their concrete job descriptions entailed forms of social-control over other workers who they, as professionals, encountered as patients, students, parents, and community members. See: Gabriel Winant, "The Baby and the Bathwater: Class Analysis and Class Formation after Deindustrialisation," *Historical Materialism*, October 1, 2024, 1–28.; Reimut Reiche, *Sexuality and Class Struggle*, trans. Susan Bennett (Verso Books, 1970).

The conceptualization of class has never been a straightforward task. Defining the working class and its related terms like worker and proletariat was a major topic of debate in Marxism and Marxist sociology in the 20th century. Rather than only meaning discrete social groups defined by income, education, status, occupation, or other proxy data, I use class as a term encompassing contradictory social relations existing between those who produce and those who appropriate surplus[19] and referring to the "past, present, and potential wage-labour force, together with all those whose maintenance depends on the wage but who do not or cannot themselves enter wage-labour."[20] I combine three general ingredients in my conceptualization: openness, reflecting the dynamism inherent in the referent both objectively and subjectively, and drawing on Open Marxists like Heide Gerstenberger who define class as process rather than a static group or quality of an individual[21]; proletarianization[22] and constitutive primitive accumulation (rather than

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In less Marxist arenas of debate, but still overlapping, there was the question of how these segments of workers encountered one another as culturally and aesthetically different and potentially antagonistic – the work of Bourdieu is the most significant. These discussions all overlapped in circles of political activism in the 1960s and 70s, and on the New Left particularly. Barbara Ehrenreich was one of the most prominent contributors to trying to understand this issue, and her work with John Ehrenreich coining the "Professional Managerial Class" has been used and abused ever since. Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich, "Death of a Yuppie Dream: The Rise and Fall of the Professional-Managerial Class" (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, February 2013).; "The New Left and the Professional-Managerial Class," *Radical America* 11, no. 3 (June 1977): 7–24.

The conflicts of the 20th century and their prosecutors – whether of the imperialist core on the revolutionary periphery – seem to have avoided prominent integration into these theoretical discussions of class. This is curious as, politically the question of salts (workers who take jobs at a specific workplace with the goal of organizing and unionizing fellow workers from the inside) in the military was a minor tactic and Maoism was extremely influential in Europe as was decolonial insurgency among the Panthers in the U.S. In the language of certain sociological theories, soldiers could be of the "contradictory classes" (Wright has seemingly endless proliferations of diagrams and 2-by-2s to conceptualize them). Bonefeld says pithily that "class is a living contradiction: Contradictions cannot be classified." (Werner Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 105.) At his most narrow, Poulantzas restricts the working class proper to industrial workers producing surplus value in a private firm, that is, in direct confrontation with a capitalist antagonist.

[19] Heide Gerstenberger, "The Bourgeois State Form Revisited," in *Open Marxism 1: Dialectics and History*, ed. Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, and Kosmas Psychopedis (Pluto Press, 1992), 155.

[20] Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (Haymarket Books, 2013), 166.

[21] Gerstenberger, "Bourgeois State Form Revisited."

[22] The proletariat is variously defined in the works of Marx and Engels, for example: "The class of modern wage-labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (Penguin Books, 2011), 219.

industrial productivity or culture) drawing upon Werner Bonefeld[23]; and political class struggle, with reference to Reimut Reiche, where meaningfully conceptualizing class in concrete moments ultimately happens.[24]

The state is the political form of capitalist social relations. This approach understands the state as a form assumed by class struggle, allowing us to see the separation between the 'economic' and the 'political' as a difference within, and constituted by, an active unity.[25] Capitalism is not a mere economic arrangement, but a foundational structuring of social relations based on the separation of producers from their means of reproduction and the separation of society into spheres, such as the 'economy' and 'politics'. Capitalism is distinct in the relationship between the class of direct producers and the class of owners of the conditions of production; the direct producers do not possess their own means of subsistence, and are bound therefore by the process of surplus extraction – the achievement of human societies to produce more than is required for the survival of those who produce it – by the requirement to sell their labour-power in order to gain their means of existence or subsistence. Capitalist relations of surplus extraction are distinctive: "a legally sanctioned contract of exchange between formal equals in which the labourer accepts authoritative subordination in the private realm of production and forgoes any rights over the product of exchange for an agreed wage payment."[26] John Holloway says that what sets Marxism apart from other radical traditions is crisis theory, a theory of capitalist instability: "Capitalism is oppressive,

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[23] Werner Bonefeld, "Primitive Accumulation and Capitalist Accumulation: Notes on Social Constitution and Expropriation," *Science & Society* 75, no. 3 (2011): 379–99.

[24] Reckoning with the non-identity across the advanced capitalist oppressed class in the New Left in West Germany particularly: "The debate over the concept of class only becomes meaningful when the purpose is to explain why these variants were coined, what the oppressed class really does suffer from, what it is doing, what it understands and does not understand, whether it is fighting, and if so *whom*, to abolish its oppression in order to take possession of its own products, and to understand what it is not supposed to understand. Only the answers to such questions as these will produce a meaningful conception of class. So, although [...] 'the existence of the common class enemy produces identity of interest, whether this is generally recognized or not', this truth remains abstract and isolated if the objective identity is not accompanied by an equally objective solidarity among those concerned. And this only comes about through the class struggle." Reiche, *Sexuality and Class Struggle*, 19.

[25] Bonefeld, "Social Constitution," 121. See also: Alexander Neupert-Doppler, "Society and Political Form," in *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, ed. Beverley Best, Werner Bonefeld, and Chris O'Kane, trans. Niall Bond and Werner Bonefeld (SAGE Publications, 2018), 816–33.

[26] Rosenberg, *Empire of Civil Society*, 124.

but it is a self-contradictory and unstable form of oppression."[27] It is this unique "need for capital to intensify and increase exploitation of labour to compete with other firms and reproduce itself"[28] – exploitation itself – that means that capitalism is riven with not only oppression but instability. Capital's political form depends on labour and this represents its greatest weakness. The state is neither separate from the world of capitalist exploitation, nor something that interacts with the economy or the market. Rather, they are internally related parts of a whole, whereby the struggles over soldiering labour, including by soldiers themselves, are class struggles.

2.1.2 Military as Mystification of Labour

Military power is in part the mystification of labour: the living labour of soldiers and others is combined with the dead labour congealed in fetishized technological forms of weapons and other commodities – 'assets', in military parlance. Political violence, one form of trans-historical political power, performed by soldiers is appropriated through the social division of labour from the popular classes to the state: the phenomenon captured in the 'state monopoly on violence' as well as the broader modern administrative professionalization of the state that Marx critiqued.[29] By this process, the mass of the population is distanced from the many practices of governance and political life, including political violence, whose delegation to the soldier encompasses its social power as a form.

Organized mass cooperation has been at the heart of much Marxist socialist politics of self-emancipation and analysis of capitalist society. It takes the forms of capitalist labour-power, capitalist armed manpower, and a Marxist vision of socialist democracy and power. Labour unions, armed power (defensive or insurrectionary), and democratic parliamentarism are three forms of power available in the abstract to mass working-class politics. All three forms are related as expressions of social capacities and powers of working people in organized mass cooperation.

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[27] John Holloway, "Crisis, Fetishism, Class Composition," in *Open Marxism 2: Theory and Practice*, ed. Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, and Kosmos Psychopedis (Pluto Press, 1992), 162.

[28] Holloway, "Crisis, Fetishism, Class Composition," 165.

[29] Bruno Leipold has notably brought Marx on 'cheap' government with essential administration performed by citizens into greater view and appreciation in recent years. Bruno Leipold, *Citizen Marx: Republicanism and the Formation of Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2024).

These powers are produced historically by the developments of capitalism: mass industrialisation congregating workers together; mass militaries staffed by conscripts and working-class people; and universal suffrage and political rights, and (more importantly) proletarian modes of political practice. These are, in the abstract, politically indeterminate types of power; that is to say, their practice is not sufficient for self-emancipation of the working-class or socialism. Indeed, their creation as capitalist phenomena means that they are not in fact neutral and cannot be simply appropriated and redirected towards working-class socialist aims. These are forms of power held by working class people, under the control of the capitalist state and social relations. All of these as they exist in capitalist society are variously and often contradictorily mediated by real social phenomena, such as socialist ideology and ethos of solidarity, but also conservatism, authoritarianism, nationalism, and other racial and gendered chauvinisms. The military form, as a violent political force, can be subverted in a particular way that is not available in the union form or in the parliamentary form (indeed they are subverted in the present most notably by right-wing politics).[30]

Like capital's other forms, the state and international state system are mystified forms of appearance of social labour. Social powers, capacities of mass cooperation, are the capacities of the producers themselves.[31] Struggles of soldiering labour can ideologically unite waged life, the economic struggle for power of the means of reproduction and production, and the struggle for popular political sovereignty, which the capitalist state as employer of waged soldiering labour and political form of capitalist social relations typifies.

2.1.3 Struggle for Sovereignty over Labour and Life

The historical experiences of struggle that I explore in this dissertation are at root, struggles for political *sovereignty* over the labour of political violence and (implicitly thereby) over social life. In the 'militia question' (chapter three), the class struggle over the military form shows the origins

[30] Not all of these forms are always available or desirable. Before the achievement of universal suffrage, when mass parliamentary party politics was unavailable, armed force and labour organizing were more tenable forms of power. In a circumstance of mass unemployment, armed force may be still more viable than labour organizing.

[31] Beverley Best, *The Automatic Fetish: The Law of Value in Marx's Capital* (Verso, 2024), 337.

of the state appropriation of political violence as a part of the social division of labour. That appropriation, the resistance and contestation from the socialist and labour movements over it represent the battle over the soldiering labour of the working class in one period of time; in another time, soldiers' grievances and struggles over their labour processes and anti-war politicization in the 1960s-70s (chapter five) represent it too.

While ideologically and institutionally the 'political' and 'economic' are separated in capitalist society, with forms of power and duties added or removed from each over time, the totality of society remains in fact political: "the differentiation of the economic is in fact a differentiation within the political sphere."[32] The unusual form of social life, the division of "political functions between public and private spheres […] is the form of both class power and state power under capitalism."[33] Through military class struggle itself, the unity of economy and politics (the social unity that Marx identified) can be made apparent. For example, the economics of social reproduction illuminate the contradictory and changing political power over production and reproduction.

If sovereignty is the "social form of the state in a society where political power is divided between public and private spheres,"[34] as Justin Rosenburg defines it, the revolutionary struggle of the working classes is over its own collective labour, means of production, and therefore the totality of social life and the reappropriation of political power from its alienated division. This is a struggle for social labour and social product: the product of military labour, a violent component of collective political power. Differently, a radical democratic vision would encompass the dissemination of political skills or capacities, as with productive skills, among everyone, not select bureaucrats, politicians, or soldiers. However, this principle of shared capacities and responsibilities must also go with the elimination of capitalist modes of labour process and violence; a socialist vision should not just mean the formal transformation, sharing the labour of political violence as capitalistically organized, but rather the construction of social organization

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[32] Wood, "Separation of the Economic and the Political," 82.

[33] Rosenburg, *Empire of Civil Society*, 129.

[34] Rosenburg, *Empire of Civil Society*, 129.

that would make violence untenable as a mode of political power which is democratically shared universally. Conflict would surely still arise, but the tactics of its resolution would be other than violent.[35] The revolutionary task is not to reappropriate *as individuals* the power of violence, but to reappropriate *the collective project of organizing all political power*. This task of reappropriation could be the expropriation of the expropriators: revolution. Only then can the element of violence, like exploitation, be abolished along with its forms of labour.

2.2 Freedom and the Critique of the Labour of Political Violence

The political horizon that orients this work is emancipation. My conceptualization of emancipation is envisioned as a future wherein all are provided for, free of the domination of the value form and wherein the social product is governed and shared socially for the free development of all.[36] The social product consists of all goods and services, which are produced socially already due to the developments of global capitalism. Rather than appropriation of ownership by a tyrannical class of private individuals (capitalist class), the collective social product would be appropriated by the producers, not individually (as product cannot be identifiably attributed to individual labour even if it were desirable to try to do so),[37] but collectively and shared according to the variety of human and socially determined needs. The idea of all being provided for might appear to be a conceptualization of 'economic' or 'material' freedom that says nothing directly about 'politics' (i.e. government, state, administration, and constitution thereof) but to which a concept of political, cultural, individual, social, or other freedoms might be added in some combination. Marx's 'freedom' is often misunderstood as being anti-political,[38] but the ambition of social ownership of

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[35] Lacking space to elaborate on theories of violence, I want to note that here I am invoking violence as a tactic, but I also appreciate its significance as ideology, psychology, aesthetic. On the underappreciation in political and social theory of violence-from-below (working-class, anti-colonial, or other subaltern groups) as *tactical* (rather than ideological, etc.), and notably its appreciation by counterinsurgency theorists and state actors, see: Robert Ovetz, *When Workers Shot Back: Class Conflict from 1877-1921* (Brill, 2019), 1–29.

[36] Michael A. Lebowitz, *The Socialist Imperative: From Gotha to Now* (NYU Press, 2015).

[37] Bonefeld writes, "the idea that commodities represent self-produced property that the individual commodity owners bring to the market was a useful analytical assumption that simultaneously conceals its social character." Werner Bonefeld, "Notes on Pashukanis: From Legal Subject towards the Critique of Class Society," *Legal Form* (blog), January 6, 2025.

[38] See an argument against this in Leipold, *Citizen Marx*.

the social product does already have a political premise, including the critique of politics as conceived by capitalist social relations.

Politics in capitalist society is characterized by a bifurcation of the political, as discussed above, and as capitalism divides social life into discrete spheres each develops its own specialized, proprietary knowledge and expertise. A political result of this social division of labour is that the governance of each largely becomes either exclusive or deniable as political. For example, the average man or woman is not sufficiently knowledgeable to have a political opinion and influence on nuclear or monetary policy, and/or nuclear or monetary policy have a correct or incorrect 'answer', a matter of technical knowledge and not at all political, perhaps outsourced from even representative government to specialized bureaucracies or an executive branch.[39] A Marxist vision of socialism is one where social life's unity is demystified along with the elimination of the social basis for its mystification: all aspects of social life are understood to be political, thereby bringing 'economics' under political control. This is a claim of popular political sovereignty over all of social life; sovereignty we could think of a rightful ownership of the social product which encompasses the fulfilment of needs, not just consumable objects but other goods like education, health, housing, and political power, all of which are the product of purposeful cooperative activity. Powers of politics and production, while often attributed to the state or capital, are in fact the capacities of the producers themselves.[40] How to share the social product, how to govern, how to deal with conflict[41] and disagreement and violation – these are all politics of a unified social life.

I argue that the military too, is such a specialized sphere of expert knowledge, an exclusive political sphere in its 'ends' and a denied-to-be-political sphere in its 'means'. This is in part due to the military as a part of international politics. "International politics is to be understood predominantly

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[39] Daniel Bessner and Nicolas Guilhot, eds., *The Decisionist Imagination: Sovereignty, Social Science, and Democracy in the 20th Century* (Berghahn Books, 2019).

[40] Best, *Automatic Fetish*, 337.

[41] Conflict I take not to be a 'problem' but rather a fact of human society, the types of conflicts and methods of resolution (or non-resolution, denial, repression, etc.) informed by the type of society itself. Rochelle DuFord, *Solidarity in Conflict: A Democratic Theory* (Stanford University Press, 2022).

as the realm of interaction between sovereign authorities – a realm which is separate from that of domestic politics."[42] Much of this realist point of view is easily assimilated into common sense, especially the antidemocratic tendencies of specialized knowledge and therefore exclusive authority, earning Rosenberg's description as "an operator's manual posing as [a social theory]."[43] Lacking space to present a thorough and representative evaluation of international relations theory writ large, these assumptions are sufficient to present what is challenged by this project: the bifurcation of the political, and the exclusive agency of politicians (or, more accurately in certain realist terms, the structural compulsions of anarchy and the balance of power that move through politicians). Instead, we should demystify the unity of social life's totality, inclusive of the military and foreign policy, and consider what an emancipatory political horizon would demand of the labour of political violence embodied in the military form.

There are some ideas that have been proffered by the historical socialist tradition, some of which will be explored in the following chapters. Military aims, uses, and means could be subjected to political deliberation. Popular decisions could be required as to peace or war; popular militia could replace the standing army.[44] The type of state could be transformed, and perhaps we accept the military as a specialized sphere of knowledge, which a proletarian state would have to wield to survive in the hostile international state system.[45] Soldiers could unionize, identify with the international working-class, exercise power over their labour to prevent the prosecution of wars unfavourable to the popular will, and ensure the humane treatment of those who perform the labour of political violence.[46] These are ideas directly reimagining the labour of political violence and its relationship to radical popular democracy and/or socialism.

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[42] Rosenberg, *Empire of Civil Society*, 9.

[43] Rosenberg, *Empire of Civil Society*, 10.

[44] See chapter 3.

[45] See chapter 3.

[46] See chapter 5.

However, reimagining the labour of political violence in *relation* to the rest of the entirety of social life's collective production and reproduction may be secondary – in other words, the labour of political violence may be transformed as a necessary outcome of transforming other aspects of society.[47] The productive activity of producers and natural resources may be put to the production of useful objects and human knowledge and skills other than weapons, military installations, aircraft, tanks, industrialized mass death and the threat thereof. A climate future without mass human and environmental death will require the allocation of resources and human talents toward projects other than political violence, and thereby certain modes of conflict must be made impossible. In Marx's own vision of "cheap government", exploitation by capital and by taxation was part of what raised funds for militarism in the first place; a Marxian socialism would surely not provide a tax base that would make the capital-intensive militaries of today possible. I argue that what an emancipatory political horizon demands of the labour of political violence is its abolition.

Why consider the *labour* of political violence if only to seek its ultimate abolition? Factually and normatively, the question of labour is the question of how human beings spend their finite life on earth, daily and in totality: to what ends do we expend our brain and muscle, for whom, for what modes of existence? Exploitation or emancipation? Violence or care? Alienation of labour, time, energy and one's life are put to ends determined by and benefiting an antagonistic other; for the majority of our life, we cannot choose whether or not to sell our labour-power in a way that contributes to the generation of surplus value.[48]

If we look at geopolitics in the conventional way, political and military elites are the protagonists. But when we look at the labour that makes the events of geopolitics possible – from barracks and war ships, to munitions and clothing factories, to ports and docks, to schools, kitchens, and mines – the international working class is the protagonist. In labour studies of the 'traditional' working class, the proverbial factory worker, we look at labour and see something different than if we look

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[47] See, for example, how Engels saw the land question as a way through which both rural exploitation could be ended, as well as the concentration of armed power on the side of the Junkers, in chapter 3.

[48] On normative arguments against capitalism, and contrary to liberal egalitarian normative political theoretical objections to Marxism: Smith, *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism*.

at the company or the boss. We see conflict, politics, disunity of the inherent antagonistic, unstable characteristics of class rule in capitalism based on exploitation and competition.[49] The same is available to us in the state and the military. Looking at labour illuminates the characteristics of class rule, class struggle, and we can see the state forming in this context.

Labour*ism* can elevate labour (a capitalist entity) itself, which I seek to avoid. Labour in capitalism has a dual character, the abstract and the concrete. As Marx put it, "To be a productive worker is therefore not a piece of luck, but a misfortune."[50] The mystification hides from us what we are not supposed to understand:[51] that if the power of the state is made up of the collective's social labours, then that labour can be withdrawn. The military is a part of social life, this means that it ought to

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[49] Holloway, "Crisis, Fetishism, Class Composition".

[50] Marx, *Capital*, 644. The full passages preceding this quotation is worth reading in full: "In so far as the labour process is purely individual, the same worker unites in himself all the functions that later on become separated. When an individual appropriates natural objects for his own livelihood, he alone supervises his own activity. Later on he is supervised by others. The solitary man cannot operate upon nature without calling his own muscles into play under the control of his own brain. Just as head and hand belong together in the system of nature, so in the labour process mental and physical labour are united. Later on they become separate; and this separation develops into a hostile antagonism. The product is transformed from the direct product of the individual producer into a social product, the joint product of a collective labourer, i.e. a combination of workers, each of whom stands at a different distance from the actual manipulation of the object of labour. *With the progressive accentuation of the co-operative character of the labour process, there necessarily occurs a progressive extension of the concept of productive labour, and of the concept of the bearer of that labour, the productive worker.* In order to work productively, it is no longer necessary for the individual himself to put his hand to the object; it is sufficient for him to be an organ of the collective labourer, and to perform any one of its subordinate functions. The definition of productive labour given above, the original definition, is derived from the nature of material production itself, and it remains correct for the collective labourer, considered as a whole. But it no longer holds good for each member taken individually. *Yet the concept of productive labour also becomes narrower*. Capitalist production is not merely the production of commodities, it is, by its very essence, the production of surplus-value. The worker produces not for himself, but *for capital*. It is no longer sufficient, therefore, for him simply to produce. He must produce surplus-value. *The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus-value for the capitalist, or in other words contributes towards the self-valorization of capital.* If we may take an example from outside the sphere of material production, a school master is a productive worker when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his pupils, he works himself into the ground to enrich the owner of the school. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of a sausage factory, makes no difference to the relation. *The concept of a productive worker therefore implies not merely a relation between the activity of work and its useful effect, between the worker and the product of his work, but also a specifically social relation of production, a relation with a historical origin which stamps the worker as capital's direct means of valorization.* To be a productive worker is therefore not a piece of luck, but a misfortune." Emphasis is my own.

I take "the critically adopted standpoint of labour", which Marx did as "a matter not of mere partiality but of the place of labour in the social totality." C.J. Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and His Relation to Hegel* (Blackwell, 1986), 145. See also: Cynthia Cockburn in Shahrzad Mojab, ed. *Marxism and Feminism* (Zed Books, 2015), 331.

[51] Reiche, *Sexuality and Class Struggle*.

be subject to claims of popular sovereignty of labour and their products. Social life, as opposed to natural life, emancipation as opposed to the tyranny of value, are open. Human labour is profoundly indeterminate, as the epigraph of this chapter states; by appreciating the labour that makes necessary the violence power of the capitalist state, and as one mode of political life, we can reimagine it too as a part of this indeterminacy and therefore political openness to an entirely other mode of existence. Antagonistic relations of capitalist class rules are rendered unstable by their openness, that is their dynamic, ever-unfolding, character: the openness to struggle and, ultimately, the abolition of the rule of value and labour – for the conquest of social life.

The Marxist tradition that emerged out of the European radical democratic movement grappled with the question of state violence from the beginning. The next chapter looks at how the labour of political violence and its organization in the state form was analysed by Marx and others, drawing upon old republican debates over the standing army and militia and transforming them for a new political movement to construct popular revolutionary power.

Chapter 3
The Militia Question

3 Introduction

This chapter looks at the militia question, which is defined here as the question of how to organize the labour of the state's repressive power. The militia question is most associated with Enlightenment Europe where its importance turned on the benefit to national defence, political economy and social order. The Marxist tradition inherited this question through socialism's republican roots and critique of political economy. This chapter traces this inheritance and transformation from Marx and Engels to the Soviet Union.

Ideas from the bourgeois republican *revolutionary* militia tradition[1] were transformed for a new revolutionary tradition: the self-emancipation of the international working class. The militia question as a historical phenomenon can help get us closer to a *historical materialist* theory of the state's 'monopoly' on violence and understand the military as a site of class struggle through time capitalist crises and ruling class instabilities, from the turbulent rise of industrial capital to the rise of the earliest socialist revolution to grapple with state formation.[2]

The militia is not a viable, straightforward alternative today, and indeed the prospect of militia as an alternative to the army was contested in socialist circles in the period under consideration. It is, however, a useful tool or prism for my critique of the soldier's labour, highlighting the capitalist social relations and struggles at the heart of this form. State violence is constantly de-politicized even while occurring within the most properly-political form. The militia question brings out this tension by the very proposal of violent power being a rightful capability of citizens. It raises the specter of popular power untethered from the nation-state's cross-class unity. What if the people could not only fight the wars, but also control them and decide on their ends? The militia, as an idea, is simultaneously reviled, admired, and even fetishized for its promises of some kind of

[1] Samuel Hayat, *Revolutionary Republicanism: Participation and Representation in 1848 France* (Routledge, 2024).

[2] By unstable I mean that the rule of a particular class was seriously contested by another and/or that a class was in the process of consolidating social power in the state form.

democratic or popular-ownership over the repressive power claimed by the state. In this sense the militia question, connected to the interrogation of the national-form, speaks to the spectre of revolutionary force: in the slave revolt, the commune, the insurgency.

The early Marxist tradition built upon and transformed the militia question for strategic or pragmatic political uses, but also in support of what we know as revolutionary subjectivity and transformation. Militia in the republican and conservative tradition, beginning in the Enlightenment, represented a bulwark against 'tyranny' of the sovereign or of the popular classes, one venue for cultivating and practicing civic virtue and submitting to the – gendered, classed, and racialized – hierarchies of 'nature' and 'civilization'.[3] For Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the Enlightenment debates represented an opening into analyzing and understanding the violent power of the ruling class in connection to political economy through key questions of resources, including labour. But the principle of militia also represented a popular claim on power as well as the opportunity for transformative 'schooling' through fighting, much like self-emancipatory political participation writ large in parties and trade unions: turning disciplined industrial workers into self-disciplined revolutionaries.[4] Ultimately, for Marx, the militia was not a final ideal form of political violence for a communist utopia but stood alongside and in uneasy juxtaposition with the standing army, a site of class struggle, and therefore of potential class-consciousness and revolutionary power.

This chapter begins with a historical overview of the development of the labour of the soldier as a feature of the development of capitalism. This history establishes the material basis of the ideological debates of the Enlightenment about how best to organize that labour for the state/civil society's best ordering. Within these debates we will focus on key pro-militia thinkers Fletcher and Ferguson, key pro-standing army thinkers, Hume and Smith, and a critique by Wollstonecraft. This sets up the pre-history of Marxism and the militia question. In the Age of Revolutions, this bourgeois republican-liberal debate branched out in a few directions, one of which was into the

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[3] Silvia Sebastiani, "Barbarism and Republicanism," in *Scottish Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century, Volume I: Morals, Politics, Art, Religion*, eds. Aaron Garrett and James A. Harris (Oxford University Press, 2015).

[4] Lebowitz, *Socialist Imperative*.

innovative proletarian revolutionary tradition of Marxism. From here we look at Marx and Engels themselves in three periods after 1848: the U.S. Civil War, the Gotha Programme, and Engels' late military critiques. After Engels' death, we look at the continued debates in Germany, and then the debates in the nascent Soviet Union.

3.1 Enlightenment Debates: Standing Army versus Militia

3.1.1 Development of the labour of the soldier and its concept

As capital composes and re-composes classes in historical periods, this is not just a matter of employment but a matter of the mode of existence. The mode of existence is the larger reproductive context for the emergence of soldiering in its early modern and modern forms. Original accumulation was a historical process of dispossession of people from their lands and pre-capitalist modes of production and reproduction, the appropriation of these resources by capital, and the proletarianization of the dispossessed. It is also an ongoing condition of capitalism, as will be discussed in later chapters. But the proletariat at its creation in the early modern era, to generalize, "could not be fully absorbed by industry."[5] The proletarians whose labour could not be absorbed by nascent capital still needed to collect money to reproduce themselves, and they "flowed into tramping labour, indentured servitude, and the army and navy."[6] The historical co-constitution of capitalist and military power both run through soldiers.

'Soldier' is a concept that has changed meaning along with its referents, and the referents have themselves always been internally varied and heterogeneous.[7] Across history, the preferred type of armed force has been debated, and the existing types of organization have been multiple; the militia question was not totally speculative, let alone utopian. Since this is a critique of both the

[5] Way, "Class-Warfare," 76.

[6] Way, "Class-Warfare," 76. "Merchant-capital required armed forces to secure and defend its interests, and the changes initiated by capital-accumulation, in the freeing of labour-power, generated its own martial labour-force. The fact that Britain rose to the status of most advanced economic power and the dominant military power in the mid-eighteenth century derived from no mere coincidence."

[7] Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack, eds., *Britain's Soldiers: Rethinking War and Society, 1715-1815* Vol. 5. (Liverpool University Press, 2014).; Heuser, "Who Fights?".; Gerstenberger, *Impersonal Power*.

form and substance of this labour, I propose we return to the history of the capitalist nation-state in its modern form and look at the debates of what form of armed force was preferable in its nascence: the standing army or the militia. Defining militia and standing army for our purposes here entails a great deal of generalizing. Indeed, the Enlightenment thinkers who debated the topic were concerned above all with political principles, social outcomes, and philosophical premises, not what we might call administrative concerns and logistics. The ideals of standing armies, militias, and mercenary forces, and what they actually looked like in the 17th and 18th centuries as phenomena, were already quite different.

These ideological debates that emerged in particular historical-material circumstances, when the rule of monarchy and aristocracy was in decline, and the rule of the bourgeoisie was ascendent. In England and Scotland, where most of these thinkers were writing from, the early modern period was particularly marked by this struggle.[8] Across Western Europe, state power was being contested and consolidated in the 18th-century, along with the transformation of national armed forces, including the very form of the ideal soldier, to function within early capitalism. This period gave rise to the fiscal-military state, where the financing of regular armed forces, and the ends to which they were put in colonization and inter-imperial rivalry, were coupled with taxation and state bureaucratization and professionalization of officers.[9]

The successful form of state armed force, a standing army, is highly heterogeneous, but to generalize: standing armies are regular armed forces permanently maintained in peacetime, characterized over time increasingly by large size, enduring abilities to maintain size and power in the face of attrition and casualties, professionalism, and divided in some fashion into different branches (army, navy, later air force, etc.), often supplemented by a contingent of conscripts or reserves. This general form's development depended a great deal on increased wealth for both

[8] On 'British' forces see: Matthew McCormack, *Embodying the Militia in Georgian England* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack, "Defining Soldiers: Britain's Military, c.1740–1815," *War in History* 20, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 144–59.; Neal Garnham, ed. "Introduction: Militia Issues," in *The Militia in Eighteenth-Century Ireland: In Defence of the Protestant Interest*, (Boydell & Brewer, 2012)1–4. See also Sebastiani, "Barbarism and Republicanism".

[9] Christopher Storrs, *The Fiscal-Military State in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Essays in Honour of P. G. M. Dickson* (Ashgate, 2009).; Garnham, "Introduction: Militia Issues".

supplies and for surplus manpower, as well as developments such as literacy, ideology, and battlefield technological developments that rendered old forms of war problematic.[10] The institutional form of the standing army, particularly the characteristics of mass,[11] professional officer corps, and nationalism, proliferated in the period from the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) onward and continued to develop, usually with an innovation in one country (Prussia and the Napoleonic Empire especially) that would then be adopted and adapted to by others.[12]

Many of these characteristics are premised upon the high productive capacity of capitalism, the 'freedom' of masses of the working-age population from land, and the high-output of production such that it can spare masses of people to be permanently involved with unproductive labour and maintain *their* daily reproduction on that basis of that output. Engels wrote,

> [modern warfare's] precondition is the social and political emancipation of the bourgeoisie and small peasants. The bourgeoisie provides the money, the small peasants supply the soldiers. The emancipation of both classes from feudal and guild fetters is required in order to provide the colossal armies of the present day; and the degree of wealth and education connected with this stage of social development is equally required in order to provide the material in the way of weapons, munitions, provisions, and so on, necessary for modern armies, and in order to provide the required number of trained officers and to give the soldier himself the required degree of intelligence.[13]

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[10] Barry R. Posen, "Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power," *International Security* 18, no. 2 (1993): 83–84.

[11] Mass in military terms has been variously defined as a *principle*, typically referring to the principle of the superiority of numbers or the high concentration of combat power. Posen writes, "The essence of the mass army is only partly its size, although it is a great deal larger than most of its predecessors. The essence of the mass army is its ability to maintain its size in the face of the rigors of war: the attrition exacted by the unhealthful conditions of the campaign, the temptation of individuals to desert, and the firepower of the enemy. Its second essential quality is that it can also to a very large extent retain its "combat power." Replacements can be armed, trained, and organized rapidly so that they can be maneuvered over great distances and employed in engagements. Thus the recruits must arrive with a certain willingness to become soldiers, a certain educability, and a certain commitment to the outcome of the battle." Posen, "Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power," 83.

[12] William Hardy McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A. D. 1000* (University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[13] Friedrich Engels, "Conditions and Prospects of a War of the Holy Alliance Against France in 1852," in *Marx & Engels Collected Works: Marx and Engels 1849-51*, volume 10 (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 550.

This premise of surplus is further enabled by the imperial organization of *global* extraction and production.

Militia, by contrast, refers to military organization of civilians with limited military training (non-professionals), for limited terms of service (part-time or in emergencies), usually for local defense. In addition to being defined by these contracting and training conditions, they are associated strongly with defensive war; that is, they are territorially organized for defence of their 'home' locales and not meant for offensive war and expeditions abroad. Militias too have a pre-capitalist history, with ancient and medieval instantiations.[14] Enlightenment thinkers, like Fletcher and Ferguson drew upon the ancient heritage of the idea, particularly the hierarchical nature of ancient, medieval, and early modern militia. As with regular armed forces, militia in history took many different forms, and have similarities today to many reserve or national guard systems.[15] Militia in contemporary usage can also refer to a rebel or terrorist military organization and often carries criminal connotations when not explicitly a part of a regular military's reserve or support system.

3.1.2 The Enlightenment and Karl Marx

Karl Marx is often seen as both the most revolutionary product of the Enlightenment and its foremost revolutionary critic. In matters of armed force and the state, this is no less true. The importance of the form of state armed force as a debate in early capitalism and its discourses is an underappreciated context of the 'founder' of Marxist thought on revolution, war, and the state. This section considers the militia question, especially the republican contributions thereto, for several reasons, the first being historical, as context for Marx's political thinking. His critique of classical political economy became the foundation of his most significant theoretical work, Capital, and for political economists the question of militia or standing army was a significant

[14] Yves Winter, "The Prince and His Art of War: Machiavelli's Military Populism," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (March 2014): 165–91.

[15] For example, in the U.S. armed forces, the Army and Air National Guards are a significant reserve of more than 430,000 civilian soldiers, tasked with domestic and overseas operations alongside active-duty personnel, including domestic law enforcement, natural disaster response, border security, political protest policing, and foreign intelligence; its origins are in colonial militias in the English tradition, with legislation using the term militia into the 20th century, and were significant as police auxiliaries for labour disputes and for enforcing slavery. Anshu Siripurapu and Noah Berman, "What Does the U.S. National Guard Do?" (Council on Foreign Relations, April 3, 2014).

question for the form of capitalism as it developed. Furthermore, Marx's critiques of contemporary 19th-century politics and thought post-1848 are frequently oriented in some way toward republican politics. He both "recognized the historically progressive character" of and supported "various republican movements which sought to advance the cause of political emancipation" while also never shying from critique in matters both theoretical and practical-political.[16] We will see this in particular with respect to German social democrats.

Second, after Marx's lifetime, the militia question in a socialist and Marxist idiom was made live again in the Russian Revolution and early Soviet Union debates about a military doctrine and state development. The soldier, insurgent, and militia-member were actively debated as forms in terms of *socialist ideals* and in terms of *socialist strategy* in live-battle with first the Tsarist Army and then the forces of reaction including counter-revolutionary Russian and foreign armed forces. These are significant not only historically but as underappreciated foundational texts of 20th-century Marxist thinking on state power and working-class socialist political strategy to build power through or against it – soldiers particularly, tend to be overlooked outside of specialist histories. The historical wrestling with the socialist state form and critique of preceding (Tsarist/capitalist) social organization of government and production faced precisely the question of capitalism's relationship to the destructiveness and repression of war, military, and soldier forms: does socialism require entirely new forms to overcome capitalism? Or does the capitalist world system to which such forms must relate necessitate rivalry to survive and succeed?

Relatedly, the revival of interest in republicanism among certain Marxists and socialists in recent years has been significant.[17] It follows the reinvigoration of civic republican thought in the late

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[16] Jeffrey C. Isaac, "The Lion's Skin of Politics: Marx on Republicanism," *Polity* 22, no. 3 (1990): 461–88.

[17] See: Leipold, *Citizen Marx*.; Bruno Leipold, Karma Nabulsi, and Stuart White, eds., *Radical Republicanism: Recovering the Tradition's Popular Heritage* (Oxford University Press, 2020).; Alex Gourevitch, "Labor Republicanism and the Transformation of Work," *Political Theory* 41, no. 4 (2013): 591–617.; Tom O'Shea, "Eugene Debs and the Socialist Republic," *Political Theory* 50, no. 6 (December 2022): 861–88.; William Clare Roberts, "Marx's Social Republic: Political Not Metaphysical," *Historical Materialism* 27, no. 2 (July 8, 2019): 41–58.; Michael J. Thompson, "A Theory of Council Republicanism," in *Council Democracy: Towards a Democratic Socialist Politics*, ed. James Muldoon (Routledge, 2018).;"The Radical Republican Structure of Marx's Critique of Capitalist Society," *Critique* 47, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 391–409.; Michael Coleman, "Securing Non-Domination in the Social Republic: A Social Republican Theory of Rights," *European Journal of Political Theory* 24, no. 2 (October 19, 2023): 200–221.; Norman Arthur Fischer, "Roots of Marxist Republican Democratic Ethics," in *Marxist Ethics*

20th century by Quintin Skinner, J.G.A. Pocock, and others, who connected Aristotle, through Machiavelli[18] to the Revolutionary Age.[19] Republicanism we can define roughly as "forms of political government freed from monarchical elements and with some degree of popular involvement, most often through mechanisms of representation" or on the philosophical side, various commitments to self-governance, rational governance, civic virtue, participatory politics, attuned to problems of corruption, and in contemporary discourse especially an investment in an idea of freedom as "non-domination", domination understood as subjection to the arbitrary will of another.[20] This new labour, socialist or Marxist work argues not just for the recognition of a historical relationship between republicanism and Marx but for the relevance of varieties of republican approaches to socialist and/or Marxist political and theoretical questions today. These have, interestingly, been notably silent on the question of repressive institutions generally, and the militia question (and the labour thereof) specifically. A notable exception is Bruno Leipold's work, which does identify and elaborate Marx's interest in the militia in his argument for reading Marx as a social republican.[21] The extension of the republican efforts at socialist and Marxist theorizing labour and socialist polity have not sufficiently grappled with the contradictions of the most authoritarian branch of the modern capitalist state.

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within Western Political Theory: A Dialogue with Republicanism, Communitarianism, and Liberalism, ed. Norman Arthur Fischer (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015), 21–53.; James Muldoon, "Socialist Republicanism," in *Building Power to Change the World: The Political Thought of the German Council Movements*, ed. James Muldoon (Oxford University Press, 2020).; James Muldoon and Dougie Booth, "Socialist Democracy: Rosa Luxemburg's Challenge to Democratic Theory," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 50, no. 2 (June 17, 2022): 369-390.

[18] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1975).; Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).; Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford University Press, 2003).; Cary Nederman, "Niccolò Machiavelli," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford University, 2022), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/machiavelli/.

[19] Emily C. Nacol, "J. G. A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment," in *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Contemporary Political Theory*, ed. Jacob T. Levy (Oxford University Press, 2018).

[20] Andreas Møller Mulvad and Benjamin Ask Popp-Madsen, "From Neo-Republicanism to Socialist Republicanism: Antonio Gramsci, the European Council Movements and the 'Second Republican Revival,'" *Theoria* 69, no. 171 (June 1, 2022): 97–118.

[21] Leipold, *Citizen Marx*.

What I show in the chapter is how the thinkers of the 'classical' Marxist tradition innovated upon the militia's bourgeois-national republican roots to make it fit for their revolutionary project. While not taking a labour-republican view of Marx or Marxism, I still want to appreciate the salience of this intellectual current to his thinking, and the political events of the 19th century to which he was attuned. Marx's early political development took place in the context of a live republicanism, one which was *the* radical politics of Europe prior to 1848.[22] These debates shaped the thinkable, and help make legible why his views on the state and armed force might be so challenging to thinkers of our own time: 'the militia question' that preoccupied the political economists he critiqued as well as liberal revolutionaries and proto-socialist thinkers is no longer a question for us today. The soldier – defined against the militia, the insurgent, the guerilla, the mercenary – has been the ideal form of military labour for capitalist society for most of this mode of existence's brief history.[23] This historical context can inform our understanding of the capitalist state, the intersection of labour and repression, and the requirements of a revolutionary critique. Since the militia questions is no longer an active question, we lose the theoretical importance it raised and therefore contemporary practice loses this theoretical guidance too.

3.1.3 Militia: Practice and Ideology

Militia provided "a key political battleground, on which issues of the relationships between rulers and ruled, and the structure of the constitution, were disputed;"[24] thus, the militia form was highly debated by Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, David Hume, Andrew Fletcher, and others.[25] Militia

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[22] "The defeat of the revolutions of 1848 marked the replacement of radical republicanism with Marxism and anarchism, which became the two great streams of the left." Gerald Meyer, "Marxism and Anarchism: Their Contradictions," *Science & Society* 82, no. 3 (2018): 360–85.

[23] It is beyond the scope of this chapter, but the relationship to militia and policing is a connection worth considering in the future. "Although civic militias became less important as military forces, they remained significant in both policing and as a political force throughout the early modern period. Citizen-soldiers, in other words, were not so much made redundant by the Military Revolution and the fiscal-military state, but forced to shift from one foot to the other." Maarten Prak, "Citizens, Soldiers and Civic Militias in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Past & Present*, no. 228 (2015): 93–123.

[24] Garnham, "Introduction: Militia Issues."

[25] John Childs, "The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue," *History of European Ideas* 8, no. 1 (January 1, 1987): 110–11.; Andrew Fletcher, "A Discourse of Government with Relation to Militias," in *Andrew Fletcher: Political Works*, ed. John Robertson (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–32.; John Robertson, *The Scottish*

were imagined to embody the ideals of republican citizenship: masculinity, patriotism, and cultivation of virtue.[26] Rather than a professional or mercenary army separated from the rights and duties of the free citizen, for Enlightenment thinkers militia were an enactment of citizens as constitutive of the republic. Free citizenship is not a universal feature of militias historically, however; enslaved or press-ganged proletarians from 'home' or foreign lands often filled the ranks of militia.[27] But the militia debates were ideological and primarily waged with other types of militiamen envisioned: namely, property-owning men of high rank and status. For the conservative tradition, the important differentiation between political equality and human equality is significant in the militia question as it is in related matters of nation, citizenship, and constitution. Militias made of press-gangs were not, for them, better than standing armies in terms of *virtue*, only in terms of authority, that is their *subordination* to nobility or gentry.[28]

As we investigate the relationship between capitalism and the state, the militia question's historical significance is worth considering. As Nacol writes, "Making sense of the rapid turn to wealth accumulation in an "era of devastating economic change" in Britain was, for eighteenth-century political economists, connected to bigger political questions of virtue, stability, corruption, and war."[29] As discussed above, the question of state armed force, standing army, militia, or mercenary, was tied to the very growth of capital and the 'national economy'. Enlightenment

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Enlightenment and the Militia Issue (Humanities Press, 1985).; Sebastiani, "Barbarism and Republicanism".; Charles Ivar McGrath, "Anti-Standing Army Ideology, Identity, and Ideas of Union within the British Isles, 1689–1714," *The Historical Journal* 66, no. 1 (2023): 27–48.

[26] R. Claire Snyder, *Citizen Soldiers and Manly Warriors: Military Service and Gender in the Civic Republican Tradition* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 22–24, 54-55. Matthew McCormack, *Embodying the Militia in Georgian England* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

[27] A seventeenth-century example of Spanish militia in Hispaniola for example, Donoghue mentions: "English soldiers, trapped in ambushes on twisting jungle paths, were speared by lance-wielding "Spanish" militiamen—most of whom, both free and enslaved, were actually of African descent." John Donoghue, "Resisting the 'Enslaving Design': Conscription and the Radical Politics of the Body in England's Atlantic Empire, circa 1647–1660," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 13, no. 3 (2016): 28.

[28] For many conservatives today, the U.S. Army is now capable of serving that moral function under the auspices of patriotism and professionalism, with the authority function assumed under the executive branch in practice and "the people" in theory; libertarian-minded conservatives may still object on these "tyrannical" grounds – and only direct militia-authority will do for them.

[29] Nacol, "Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment," 3.

philosophers were concerned with the best functioning of their societies, which were becoming *capitalist* societies, and aimed to theorise the problem of order and its resolution by modelling the ideal harmonious society starting from an abstract property-owning individual.[30] The harmonious ordering holds class relations to be defined by varyingly *interested* but not *inherently antagonistic* parties; rather the improvement of poverty and other maladies of the working classes was to be found in the "economic and moral progress of the nation as a whole" and the reconciling of interests.[31]

Crucial to reconciling interests was not only the class struggle in 'direct' aspects of the development of capitalist industrial production but also in the context of forced military service, which had been a significant part of 17th-century British state and empire: Donoghue calls forced military labour "an essential technology of empire building".[32] Resistance to forced military labour (conscription or impressment) was articulated in the popular republican democratic principles that proliferated during the English Revolution "linking bodily liberty to popular sovereignty" and producing mutiny, rebellion, and constitutional crises.[33] This is important to note, as the political economy was a tool of class struggle as much as a scientific enterprise.

Of the political economists, Adam Smith and David Ricardo were most highly influential for Marx, indeed he is frequently misunderstood as *himself* a political economist. Marx's objects of critique were indeed political economy's defining features: "the liberal theory of private property, the naturalistic conception of production, and the rationalistic conception of exchange."[34] While there is limited space to detail the entirety of political economy Marx studied, what is important to note

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[30] Clarke, "Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology."

[31] Clarke, "Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology," 8.

[32] Donoghue, "Resisting the 'Enslaving Design'." See also: Denver Alexander Brunsman, *The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (University of Virginia Press, 2013).; John Donoghue, *Fire Under the Ashes: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).; John Donoghue and Evelyn P. Jennings, eds., *Building the Atlantic Empires: Unfree Labor and Imperial States in the Political Economy of Capitalism, ca. 1500-1914* (Brill, 2015).

[33] Donoghue, "Resisting the 'Enslaving Design'," 28.

[34] Clarke, "Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology," 9.

is, first, that it established a fundamental insight of the relationship between "political and social institutions and the 'moral sentiments' [and…] the mode of subsistence" and established theories of value that would be significant in Marx's completely unique, revolutionary, and misunderstood theory of value.[35] Second, that thinkers like Ricardo, Malthus, or Smith, were theorists of the state, where the duty of the sovereign of "protecting society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies"[36] is key not only to individual liberty but also the general wealth and progress of a nation. The question of harmoniously supplying labour to the defence of the crown was therefore a critical question in the examination of the emergent social division of labour.

Indeed, the question of a standing army only became financially possible in the development of the early modern fiscal military state as mentioned above. Advanced militaries required great expense – to maintain in peacetime or to finance as needed – and their successes generated great wealth for private companies and individuals as well as state/crown corporations. They in many ways made capitalism as it came to be possible through colonial expedition and inter-state belligerent competition; but labour to comprise these armies was difficult to acquire.[37]

Critiques of standing armies, that defense ought to be instead carried out in the context of a highly participatory republic (of exclusive social groups) and consisting of the wide distribution of arms and training, emerged alongside the development of capitalism.[38] In eighteenth- and nineteenth-

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[35] Clarke, "Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology," 16.

[36] Adam Smith quoted in Clarke, "Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology," 30.

[37] Heuser writes, "the transformation of medieval polities into early modern States would gradually generate regular revenue needed to pay for standing armies. Some like England lagged behind, the latter long relying on ad hoc parliamentary grants of tax revenues for individual wars or even campaigns until Oliver Cromwell overthrew the monarchy in the mid-seventeenth century and *instated the New Model Army as England's first standing army*. Especially smaller States struggled to pay their soldiers regularly, continuing instead to hire mercenaries when there was need for them." Heuser, "Who Fights?"

[38] This clashes with our common sense understanding in 21st-century capitalist democracies not only because militaries have been so extremely professionalized and very much standing for generations, but also militias in the North American context call to mind the very worst of anti-democratic reaction. The racial and nationalist character of contemporary militia movements are frequently opposed to *liberal* democracy inclusive of Black people specifically and other groups, that is to say their *demos* are decidedly exclusionary. The U.S. founding's debt to republican thought is a large part of the Pocockian revival of republican political theory. On the right to arms specifically: Prak, "Citizens, Soldiers and Civic Militias."

century European thought, the political thinkers of varying traditions and projects all tried to determine the appropriate formation of armed forces and the role of war given their respective political projects. Pocock presents the republican conditions for political community, defined by the free participation of citizens in civic life, as: formal institutions established by a constitution; and citizens who demonstrate civic virtue and who have economic autonomy. Central to understanding freedom versus tyranny is the distribution of arms. The militia issue focused on all three conditions: defence and internal unity, the requirement of moral and material conditions, and freedom to take up arms, where militia participation was the simplest and most important expression of one's political liberty.

In contrast, the professional army as it came to develop was not so far-off from the mercenary army, at least in the sense that it is mediated by money-pay, rather than a civic virtue or duty of service, and is a profession and not universal to citizenship. From the fifteenth century, mercenaries had been associated increasingly with tyranny. Fighting for a sovereign who was not your own represented the subversion of political liberty as it was not an expression of citizen virtue, but merely economic-contractual.[39] Etymologically, Heuser writes, *mercenary* and *soldier* both come from a root word for their payment, *merces* or reward and *solde* or pay, and mercenary originated as a synonym for soldier.[40] Of course, the virtues are enormously significant for shaping how societies conceptualize these different categories at a given point in time. Individual mercenaries, including in the age of nationalism, were often ideologically motivated to fight for a certain cause or sovereign.[41] While espousing ideas and policies of internal and external enemies,

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[39] "Before nationalism—the elevation of an 'imagined community' beyond that of the region or the city that one had seen with one's own eyes—spread in the nineteenth century, it mattered little whether the foreign mercenaries came from another city, another region, or quite far away. Even in private wars, not only vassals and serfs would be employed, but also paid hirelings." Heuser, "Who Fights?," 228. Of Machiavelli, notable republican thinker opposed to mercenaries, she writes, "Even within campaigns, when they were not paid, they might resort to plunder; woe betide the hapless town taken by force (such as Rome in 1527 or Antwerp in 1576), once the fury of starved troops descended upon it. This, along with their cost (as compared with compulsory levies) helps explain Machiavelli's and other sixteenth-century authors' strong dislike for mercenaries."

[40] Heuser, "Who Fights?," 227.

[41] Heuser, "Who Fights?," 230. Revealingly, Heuser contrasts this ideological-motivation with the patriotism or 'duty' of a regular soldier – telling us something about how Heuser and perhaps other thinkers conceive of patriotism as non-ideological and apolitical. See also: Mark A. Lause, *Soldiers of Revolution: The Franco-Prussian Conflict and the Paris Commune* (Verso, 2022).

19th-century armies were in fact composed of people from across and outside the national or imperial boundaries and from all classes, and included foreign volunteers and mercenaries.[42] There was never a historical military that was an uncomplicated picture of national belonging and allegiance.[43]

On the subject of wars and armies in particular, the Enlightenment represented a transformation of traditional ideas under conditions of unprecedented novelty.[44] Political actors and thinkers were faced with how to square the developments of capitalism with the civic humanist model of the citizen. Capitalism in the eighteenth century was characterized by a division of labour that raised questions for right, orderly, and virtuous governance with citizenship at its core: "a polity that lives and functions through the active participation of all citizens [...] would avoid the despotism of the few and thus the decline and corruption of the political community."[45] Envisioned *for* highly unequal class societies, the division of labour, typically remembered and discussed today in terms of production, nonetheless "threw up a far more concrete problem of military specialization."[46]

3.1.3.1 Pro-Militia Thinkers

Andrew Fletcher (1655 – 1716) first conceptualized the 'militia issue', developed the idea of the standing (mercenary) armies as instruments fit for tyranny, and is credited as the first to promote the language of republicanism in Scotland.[47] Virtue for the civic republican tradition consisted not only of moral character, but also active political practice. The citizen must actively participate in

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[42] Lause, *Soldiers of Revolution.*; Helene Olsen, "The Social Construction of Mercenaries: German Soldiers in British Service during the Eighteenth Century," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 33, no. 1–2 (2022): 92–111.

[43] For a modern example, see: Sandra Halperin, "War and Social Revolution: World War I and the 'Great Transformation'," in *Cataclysm 1914: The First World War and the Making of Modern World Politics*, ed. Alexander Anievas (Brill, 2015), 1–20. It illustrates how 'good guys' have always fought for and with 'bad guys' for varying political aims and projects. There was of course much unease about this fact and policies changed over time with fears of political vulnerability, racial ideologies, and access to manpower and/or imperial holdings.

[44] Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knöbl, *War in Social Thought: Hobbes to the Present* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 27.

[45] Joas and Knöbl, *War in Social Thought,* 28.

[46] Joas and Knöbl, *War in Social Thought*, 28.

[47] Joas and Knöbl, *War in Social Thought,* 259-60 fn 17; Sebastiani, "Barbarism and Republicanism," 326.

governing and defending the polity, and for this reason, ideologically, the citizen militia represented the guarantor of political liberty.

Adam Ferguson (1723 – 1816) drew on Fletcher, took an active role in the cause of militia for Scotland, and would debate Hume and Smith in the militia debate. He was skeptical of the possible division between soldier and citizen, and argued against a professional army, as it "cuts citizens off from an important dimension of republican experience… only a citizen's militia—and not an army of professional soldiers—is capable of reconciling the need to defend the polity with its need for virtue."[48] For him, republican virtue and politics was based on the sharp division of the inhabitants of a political community into producers and citizens; only the citizens were capable of participation in political life because of their economic independence, entitling and obliging them to help defend the polity militarily.[49] Ferguson says, "the influence of laws, where they have any real effect in the preservation of liberty, is not any magic power descending from shelves that are loaded with books, but is, in reality, the influence of men resolved to be free."[50] The principle of action over mere knowledge was part of an attempt to restore virtue corrupted by the 'feminizing' influence of commercial society "we attend to the formalities of a military discipline, but know not how to employ numbers of men to obtain any purpose by stratagem or force".[51]

The active practice of citizens to realize a form of freedom achievable only in and through the community is a feature of civic republicanism that in many ways at first glance seems to echo with the Marxist tradition. Unlike in a socialist idiom however, these are virtues of a class society governed by landowners. "Politics in general, and the militia in particular, [should] inculcate the practice of moral virtue and to confirm a social hierarchy"; in other words militia was a praxis of 'authority and subordination'.[52] Military was the sphere of old power, of nobility, aristocracy,

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[48] Joas and Knöbl, *War in Social Thought*, 33.

[49] Joas and Knöbl, *War in Social Thought*, 33.

[50] Ferguson in Sebastiani, "Barbarism and Republicanism," 333.

[51] Ferguson in Sebastiani, "Barbarism and Republicanism," 333.

[52] Ferguson in Sebastiani, "Barbarism and Republicanism," 334.

gentry, and its development was shaped by this and the adaptation over time to ideas of republicanism, meritocracy, and capitalism. As Sebastiani writes, "Ferguson seemed to conclude that commerce and the military spirit could coexist in the same country only if they continued to be independent of each other"; freeholders under command of the gentry belonged to the martial, political sphere, while merchants, traders, labourers, and servants belonged to the economic sphere.[53]

3.1.3.2 Pro-Standing Army Thinkers

Whereas virtue and action were the central political commitments of Ferguson, justice was the priority of Hume and Smith.[54] David Hume (1711 – 1776) was in search of a military and political constitution compliant and linked with a republican ideal of freedom, expressing this in his preference for militia.[55] In addition, "Hume attempted to adapt civic concepts of free government and military organization to meet the novel requirements of commercial [capitalist] societies."[56] Commercial capitalist societies, the most progressive and civilized in this view, were defined by "superfluity", or surplus product and labour, and thereby had more efficient organizations of defense: "Trade and industry are really nothing but a stock of labour, which, in times of peace and tranquillity, is employed for the ease and satisfaction of individuals; but in the exigencies of state, may, in part, be turned to public advantage."[57] He asks, "When the sovereign raises an army, what is the consequence?," answering,

> He imposes a tax. This tax obliges all the people to retrench what is least necessary to their subsistence. Those, who labour in such commodities, must either enlist in the troops, or turn themselves to agriculture, and thereby oblige some labourers to enlist for want of business. And to consider the matter abstractedly, manufactures encrease [sic] the power of the state only as they store up so much labour, and that of a kind to

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[53] Sebastiani, "Barbarism and Republicanism," 334.

[54] Sebastiani, "Barbarism and Republicanism," 330.

[55] Joas and Knöbl, *War in Social Thought*, 30-31.

[56] Sebastiani, "Barbarism and Republicanism," 328.

[57] 'Of Commerce' §13 in David Hume, *David Hume on Morals, Politics, and Society* (Yale University Press, 2018), 182.

> which the public may lay claim, without depriving any one of the necessaries of life. The more labour, therefore, is employed beyond mere necessaries, the more powerful is any state; since the persons engaged in that labour may easily be converted to the public service.[58]

The advantage of productive societies was for Hume the ability to redirect surplus manpower and other resources from commercial to military purposes when necessary.[59]

Like Hume, Adam Smith (1723 – 1790) was concerned with resolving the dilemma of ancient virtue and commercial society's structures and requirements and argued in the *Wealth of Nations* for the virtue and efficiency of the standing army. Smith believed that the industrial division of labor could no longer be avoided; a synthesis of the productive worker, political citizen, and citizen-soldier was no longer possible. His writing therefore placed greater emphasis on economic development: "Because economic development demands an unrestrained division of labor, it is necessary to ensure the freedom of the individual and therefore to abandon the categorical distinction between free or full citizens".[60] On the grounds of efficiency of the division of labour, he favoured a standing army over a militia. But still concerned with virtue, he also called for state education that would cultivate military spirit (and discipline) in lower-class youths, who were in his view particularly negatively affected by the (otherwise good) division of labour in industrial capitalism.[61] He argued that professional armies are the only workable structure in commercial society: "The efficiency-driven specialization of the art of warfare and concomitant division of

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[58] 'Of Commerce' §11 in Hume, *David Hume on Morals, Politics, and Society*, 182.

[59] "Scholars are right to note that Hume thought standing armies a danger to liberty and favored militias where it was possible to sustain them (as it often wasn't); he was to that extent an old-style "republican." But we should also note that he preferred disciplined militias subject to lengthy training under executive command (a "regular militia," as he once calls it) to the undisciplined, ad hoc forces favored by skittish parliamentarians, and thought the former preferable on the grounds of liberty as well as efficiency. Hume blesses the attributes of a professional army—"officers and soldiers, . . . discipline and arms"—with the highest compliment he can give a modern and productive institution: "regular"." Andrew Sabl, "Coordinating Interests: The Liberalism of Enlargement," in *Hume's Politics: Coordination and Crisis in the History of England* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 61. Importantly, Sabl points out Hume's favour of the advance of 'military science' that comes with professionalization, and disdain for the 'glories' of feudal battles as they were based on fortune rather than rational and strategic superiority, skill, and discipline coming from the division of labour. (61–65)

[60] Joas and Knöbl, *War in Social Thought*, 33.

[61] Joas and Knöbl, *War in Social Thought*, 34.

labor in war make armies unavoidable, which is why the future belongs to the army rather than the militia."[62]

As Sebastiani writes, "Justice and political institutions accompanied the process of development and were part of its cumulative results; but they did not provide the terrain for the active involvement of citizens, and were to be entrusted to professionals," a standing army and professional politicians especially.[63] In other words, the functions of doing politics, and therefore direct power over them, in most key ways should be devolved from citizens and into a social division of labour. The social division of labor that included a standing army would establish what Smith called the first duty of the sovereign.[64] For him and Hume, "how securely societies guaranteed the rights of property and how adequately they met the needs of their labourers" became the focus of inquiry into 'progress' and 'civilization'.[65] As Smith and Hume recognized, albeit from different perspectives, the nascent capitalist state benefited from subjecting armed forces to a division of labour and professionalization. Strengthening the armed forces in this way would be a boon to the rising capitalist class's struggle against the declining nobility and against the working classes in Europe and in colonial conquests. In doing so, the mass of the population became distanced from these practices of governance and political life.

3.1.3.3 Critique of the Division of Labour in a Time of Revolution

The republican sacrifice was subjected to critique by another significant republican thinker, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797).[66] To advance her arguments for equality in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she compared women to soldiers and officers, sailors, and clergy. Scholars tend

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[62] Joas and Knöbl, *War in Social Thought*, 36; Donald Winch, "Martial Spirit and Mental Mutilation," in *Adam Smith's Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), 103–20.

[63] Sebastiani, "Barbarism and Republicanism," 331, citing Hume.

[64] Winch, "Martial Spirit and Mental Mutilation."

[65] Sebastiani, "Barbarism and Republicanism," 330.

[66] Lena Halldenius, *Mary Wollstonecraft and Feminist Republicanism: Independence, Rights and the Experience of Unfreedom* (Routledge, 2015).; Virginia Sapiro, *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 100–111, 237.

to, understandably, focus on the main argument at hand, the woman question in the republic: comparing women with masculine figures enables her argument to overcome the prejudice of natural feminine inferiority, laying the blame at the feet of society's miseducation of potential-citizens for women's character flaws rather than denying their flaws or arguing for their education on its own principled basis. An interlocutor she critiques claims women have a natural fondness for dress, to which she responds: "It is not natural; but arises, like false ambition in men, from a love of power."[67] Wollstonecraft invokes constantly the language of tyranny, corruption, slavery, and dependence. But the novelty of the masculine-feminine argument might distract from what she says about the soldier as having implications for the soldier *himself*. Indeed, we could even see the comparison serving the reverse: the republican argument supported by a derogatory comparison to the feminine.

These 'masculine' men are, like women, denied the well-rounded education to develop their senses, skills, personality, and consequently the virtues for republican citizenship.[68] Wollstonecraft's concept of citizenship is active, a practice in addition to a legal status. The practice of citizenship for those tasked with defence is imperiled by severing this task in a division of labour. The fact of comparison with the gendered division of labour is apt. Wollstonecraft sees women trained in femininity from a young age to the detriment of all: they become experts of social appearances and behaviours, beauty and fashions, of manipulation and self-selling. They become professional in the role of Woman. The specialisation of the labour of political violence is very much like the specialisation of women's virtues – and not only in their construction of gender. It is a discipline and training of speciality to one sphere of republican life: in this case, 'defence' rather than the domestic, but likewise feminizing as concerned with appearances and vanities: "The great misfortune is this, that they [officers] both acquire manners before morals, and a knowledge of life before they have from reflection, any acquaintance with the grand ideal outline of human nature."[69] This limits the individual from reaching their full potential in other

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[67] Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Vindications: The Rights of Men & The Rights of Woman*, ed. David Lorne Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Broadview Press, 1997), 137.

[68] Wollstonecraft, *Vindications*, 131.

[69] Wollstonecraft, *Vindications,* 132.

virtues and pursuits, and should they become endowed with citizens' duties, they would be ill-equipped to discharge them – a disservice to the whole community for they in fact in their education and training for and participation in these roles cultivate tyrannical characters rather than virtues and freedom.

Preceding her critique of the absence of virtuous cultivation among the officer class, she decries in chapter one the standing army as a form directly "incompatible with freedom."[70] While a romantic sense of honour may move a minority of officers, to move the *masses* of the army requires "despotism": "the main body must be moved by command, like the waves of the sea; for the strong wind of authority pushes the crowd of subalterns forward, they scarcely know or care why, with headlong fury."[71] The chain of command is essential to today's common sense democratic imaginary of proper civil-military relations, whereas for Wollstonecraft it is tyrannical. It degrades the character of the individuals who compose it, echoing critiques of conscription from mid-17th century Britain, where "[t]he state's sovereign claim over the bodies and labor of the poor came into direct, class-conscious conflict with a radical conception of popular sovereignty developed by radical republicans during the English Revolution."[72] She writes, "Every corps is a chain of despots … submitting and tyrannizing without exercising their reason,"[73] which she describes in the context of soldiers' disruptive appearances through countryside villages; a description she modifies but extends to sailors as well. She writes, "subordination and rigour are the very sinews of military discipline; and despotism is necessary to give vigour to enterprises that *one will* directs"[74]: a critique of arbitrary power that would not be far from home in contemporary labour republican accounting of work. She critiques the clergy and the nobility and monarchs, icons of republican ire, but her critique is also *general*, and describes a somewhat materialist determination of character or subjectivity: "Society, therefore, as it becomes more enlightened, should be very

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[70] Wollstonecraft, *Vindications,* 123.

[71] Wollstonecraft, *Vindications*, 123.

[72] Donoghue "Resisting the 'Enslaving Design'."

[73] Wollstonecraft, *Vindications*, 123.

[74] Wollstonecraft, *Vindications*, 123. Emphasis mine.

careful not to establish bodies of men who must necessarily be made foolish or vicious by the very constitution of their profession."[75] We can identify in her critique a sense of political sovereignty being alienated to the state from citizen's own practice, and the consequences on individual characters and political capacities or skills from fracturing social life into restricted spheres.

For the 18th-century writers, "progress and destabilization were inseparable," which we can identify with the crisis tendency of capitalism generally, and the armed forces tasked with the preservation of such a society is indispensable for this question of development; "how to develop a society and government that could manage and balance these oppositions"[76] endured for the ruling class long after the debate between philosophers was over. However, as they developed, the standing armies themselves remained characterized by combination of "paid professionals, and conscripted peasants forced to do military service in continuation of medieval obligations"[77] and in many cases colonial subjects. Furthermore, the question of how to maintain and control the labour of the standing army persisted also where militia traditions adapted and endured.

In France after the 1789 revolution amidst which Wollstonecraft was writing, the National Guard "thrived" as "instruments—albeit unstable ones—for maintaining a social domination that played out along class lines."[78] This was a "liberty placed in the service of the government" for a generation.[79] Until the 1830's, the French government's aim with respect to the National Guard "was not to produce a body of citizen-combatants or to teach citizens how to vote, but rather to symbolise the 'union of the throne and the militia.'"[80] But a radical transformation of its status would take place – "from a militia of propertied citizens into an instantiation of the armed

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[75] Wollstonecraft, *Vindications*, 124. Furthermore: "It is of great importance to observe that the character of every man is, in some degree, formed by his profession… [the common man's] opinions have been so steeped in the vat consecrated by authority, that the faint spirit which the grape of his own vine yields cannot be distinguished."

[76] Nacol, "Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment," 9.

[77] Heuser, "Who Fights?".

[78] Noah Shusterman, "The Strange History of the Right to Bear Arms in the French Revolution," *Journal of Social History* 54, no. 2 (2020): 453–79.

[79] Hayat, *Revolutionary Republicanism*, 19.

[80] Hayat, *Revolutionary Republicanism*, 19.

people."[81] It is this scene of revolutionary, popular militia that Marx and Engels encounter as young revolutionaries.[82]

3.2 Marxism and the Militia Question (1848-1919)

There has been a resurgence of academic socialist or labour republicanism in the last decade. This includes philosophic works on domination under capitalism, historically-informed theorizing on councilism, engagement with figures like Luxemburg or Gramsci reinterpreted as socialist republicans,[83] and renewed interest in industrial democracy. Of note is that social republicans focus on politicizing the productive sphere[84] or emphasizing the normative and constitutional questions in Marxist political thought; the militia question tends to manage at most a passing reference in discussions of, for example, European council experiments. This is an understandable oversight or avoidance, since revolutionary violence has only sporadically been a significant tendency in Western left(s) in the past century,[85] and the instruction of the contemporary Western left is ultimately the objective of these works' political attention.

The militia question is still important for Marx and Marxist research for several reasons. Radical republicanism was *the* radical politic prior to 1848, and militia specifically were a part of the French revolutionary tradition that so influenced the rest of continental Europe. As in the early

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[81] Hayat, *Revolutionary Republicanism*, 49.

[82] The militia debate declined by the end of the 19th century. Joas and Knöbl, *War in Social Thought*, 72–75. In the matter of the militia question as ideology, the triumph of nineteenth century liberalism was "a process of narrowing and suppressing, for a variety of reasons, arguments formerly considered important." Joas and Knöbl, *War in Social Thought*, 27. But as I demonstrate here, the debate lived on in socialism as revolutionary politics too shifted from bourgeois liberalism and republicanism to proletarian politics of radical democracy.

[83] Mulvad and Popp-Madsen, "Neo-Republicanism to Socialist Republicanism."

[84] See, ibid, the starting epigraph quoting Robert Dahl: "If democracy is justified in governing the state, then it is also justified in governing economic interests. What is more, if it cannot be justified in governing economic enterprises, we do not quite see how it can be justified in governing the state."

[85] Notable exceptions range from the Irish Republican Army to the Black Panther Party, to the Red Army Faction.

modern militia debates and the U.S. revolutionary context, the French held beliefs about the relationship of bearing arms to citizenship and about standing armies as a threat to freedom.[86]

The militia question thus raises debates essential to Marxist theory and practice that would remain relevant into the early years of the Soviet Union. It diagnoses an authoritarianism in capitalist society; this diagnosis is as relevant to advanced democracies today as it was to liberal republics in their nascence. It is not only of analytic value, but also of political strategic value; the question of how the state has power, not just as a matter of criticism (the basic debates about violence and ethics), but for assessing the strength of an entity one intends to engage with, challenge, or combat. It speaks to the question of working-class, progressive, or popular power and how to build it. What was most relevant in the middle of the 19th century was precisely the coercive state and insurrection against it. Militia was a model for a *popular* counterweight of force to contend with that state. While Marx and others would criticize the national-bourgeois character of republicanism, this component of the tradition held a concept of the popular that was a foil for what was becoming a crucial object of critique for socialists in Marx's vein: militant adventurism of small 'elite' groups, spontaneity, terrorism, putschism and other non-Marxist socialist and anarchist ideals.[87]

The militia ideal held certain opposing ideas of how to build revolutionary power against tyranny in a mass form of training, organization, discipline, and commitment to virtues. What had to be added was the critique of political economy, beyond abstract critique of domination, and coordination as opposed to localism. The core idea, of mass working class organization for real force, was partly a consideration of military counterforce, but also was a lesson for the organization of revolutionary force.

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[86] Shusterman, "Strange History of the Right to Bear Arms."

[87] Carola Dietze, *The Invention of Terrorism in Europe, Russia and the United States* (Verso, 2021).; Egan, *Dialectic of Position and Maneuver*.; Bernard Semmel ed., *Marxism and the Science of War* (Oxford University Press, 1981), 7.; Ovetz, *When Workers Shot Back*.

3.2.1 Marx, Engels, and the Militia Question (1848-1895)

Marx and Engels were deeply shaped by their experiences in the revolutionary upheaval of 1848, "the most colossal event in the history of European civil wars".[88] For Engels, it prompted his in-depth study of war and military science. For both, 1848 marked a realization of how advanced a contemporary European army was, how formidable an enemy to encounter directly, and a reassessment of political strategy as a result – it did not mark a turn away from war *as such*.[89] As imperialism and militarism grew more formidable, the urgency of the question of working-class self-emancipation for these internationalist socialists grew too. Moreover, it marked for them a new era where socialist revolution was on the agenda and the liberal bourgeoisie could not be relied upon to fight for the basic civil liberties and democratic rights that the workers movement would need to advance the struggle.[90]

The experience of defeat in 1848 did prompt a change in their views away from a 'heroic' political and military model of revolution, but not from the significance of who held arms and in what capacity. They were impressed by the role of the National Guard in France, for one. For another, in Prussia, the Assembly and Bismarck's government were in a constitutional conflict over which body had the right to reorganize the armed forces. Marx and Engels long favored universal conscription over Prussia's "traditional caste-like recruitment policies" – not least of all for the opportunity to militarily train the working class for seizing political power.[91] 1848 initiated a new militia question for socialists grappling with the nature of capitalism, the state, and revolution as matters of theory and revolutionary practice.

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[88] Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (Norton, 1978), 601.

[89] Fanon critiques Engels' pessimistic statements about the future of revolutionary violence, arguing that the decolonial guerilla age "sheds new light on the matter." Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2021), 25-26.

[90] August H. Nimtz, *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough* (State University of New York Press, 2000), 139, 240–41.

[91] Nimtz, *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*, 240-41. See: Friedrich Engels, "The Prussian Military Question and the German Workers' Party [Engels][Extract]," in Karl Marx, *The Political Writings* (Verso, 2019), 805–30.

The question of the people armed was answered in the negative by the re-consolidating ruling classes. Marx already indicated the significance of the standing army as a form in Prussia, writing in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1848: "The worthy man has gotten arms and uniform on the condition of renouncing above all his prime political rights, the right to organize", indicating a separation of powers perceived to rightly go together. In this case, the Prussian government's "watered down" civic militia[92] was for Marx producing political subjectivities equivalent to that of regular soldiers. He writes of the soldier,

> His task of protecting 'constitutional liberty' will be fulfilled in accordance with the 'spirit of his destiny' when he blindly executes the orders of the authorities, when he exchanges the customary civil liberty that was tolerated even under the absolute monarchy for the passive, will-less and self-less obedience of the soldier.[93]

This is a critique of the soldier-form that sounds at home with Wollstonecraft and other republican critics, as lacking in the qualities of a citizen by virtue of the soldier's "will-less" obedience. This is a separated and degraded popular political capability.

These are qualities more familiar to readers of Marx in the context of the factory worker. Indeed, they are connected through Marx's investment in the democratic movement. Communists of the '48 generation saw themselves as the radical, left-most flank of the general struggle for democracy.[94] This is partly what the socialist republicans today try to recover in their own way. And while the domination described above in Marx sounds more familiar in the context of discussing the productive sphere, Marx and Engels were primarily revolutionary political activists and organizers interested in politicizing the working-class to self-organize not into trade unions for their own sake, or for workplace democracy, but because the workplace is a strategic point of power in capitalist society: "*Ideas* can never lead beyond an old world order but only beyond the ideas of the old world order […]. In order to carry out ideas men are needed who can exert practical

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[92] Bruno Leipold, "Citizen Marx: the relationship between Karl Marx and republicanism" PhD diss., Oxford University, 2017), 204.

[93] Karl Marx, "Der Bürgerwehrgesetzentwurf [Neue Rheinische Zeitung, 21 July 1848]," in *Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels Werke*, 5 (Dietz Verlag, 1959), 244–5. English translation from Hal Draper, "Marx on Democratic Forms of Government," *The Socialist Register* (1974), 107.

[94] Nimtz, *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*, viii.

force."[95] Practical force can be exerted in a strike, but it can also be exerted in arms. In Prussia, the standing army's implications were clear:

> A fine school […] to bring up the republicans of the future! What has become of our *citizen*? A hybrid between a Prussian policeman and an English constable! Yet for all his losses he is consoled by the set of service regulations and the knowledge that he is obeying orders. Would it not be more original to dissolve the nation in the army rather than to dissolve the army in the nation? This transformation of constitutional phrases into Prussian facts is a truly bizarre spectacle.[96]

This passage recalls well-known writing from Marx's later period on the Paris Commune's popular or citizen army (gendarme) that he so praised. However, in the Paris writing, his focus was not on a critique of the French army, but on the (momentary) survival and success of the commune as a revolutionary force and a prefigurative emancipated society.

Engels too wrote on the democratic associations with arms in this period, in the English *Volunteer Journal for Lancaster and Cheshire*. The magazine was a part of the new militia movement in England, by no means a socialist movement, interested in defending the country during the reign of Napoleon III (1848–1870). "Engels regarded this volunteer mobilization as a potentially significant anti-Bonapartist political development in itself (and perhaps also as a promising forum for the cultivation of class consciousness".[97] As Matt Shafer has ably demonstrated in his work on Engels' "The History of the Rifle" (1861), Marx and Engels were affirmed in their belief that productive forces and social relations were related and they rejected technological fetishism. "Engels work[ed] against the everyday view of the commodified weapon as a repository of power independent of human action in the world. 'People again begin to see that men, and not muskets, must win battles'."[98] The dissolution of people into the army that Marx identified, is apparent in

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[95] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 4: Marx and Engels 1844-45* (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 119.

[96] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 7: Marx and Engels 1848* (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010): 257–8.

[97] Matt Shafer, "Rifle Theory: Engels and the History of Technology," *Political Theory* 51, no. 4 (August 1, 2023): 600.

[98] Shafer, "Rifle Theory," 612, quoting Engels. See also: Matt Shafer, "Engels after Frankfurt: Nature and Enlightenment in Critical Theory," *New German Critique* 50, no. 1, (2023): 1–29.

Engels' work too, mystifying the source of state power: labour of soldiers and others combined with fetishized technologies and other commodities. Popular rule – a concept that a Marxist idea of proletarian self-emancipation had to follow – is a social power whose potential the rifle embodies and obscures as a fetish. And more so than mere physical strength, it requires knowledge – motivating Engels' essay to educate the volunteers.

3.2.1.1 The Civil War in the United States

Another important revolutionary 'school' was the battlefields of the U.S. Civil War (12 April 1861 – 9 April 1865), which Marx and Engels viewed through the lens of emancipation, unlike the bourgeoisie and their press and politicians, and that the immense scale of the war owed to its content: a clash between two different social systems of labour.[99] Much of Engels' initial military study from 1851 onward was guided by comrade and future Colonel in the Union Army in the U.S. Civil War Joseph Weydemeyer (1818–1866), whom Engels knew as a former Prussian artillery officer turned communist and 1848 revolutionary.[100] Weydemeyer was one of many prominent German "48ers" who migrated to the U.S. and would continue the revolutionary commitment by fighting in the Civil War on the Union side.[101] Importantly, for Marx and Engels and certain fellow European socialists, they did not see the U.S. Civil War as a fight for "Southern self-determination or a free-trade policy, as it appeared to the London *Times*, or the *Economist*."[102] Rather, slavery was a precapitalist mode of exploitation, the fight against which was "part and parcel of the

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[99] Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels. *The Civil War in the United States*, Ed. Andrew Zimmerman (International Publishers, 2016), 61.; See also: Brian Kelly, "The Civil War in the United States Ed. by Karl Marx, Frederick Engels (Review)," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 16, no. 4 (2019): 133–35.

[100] August H. Nimtz and Kyle A. Edwards, *The Communist and the Revolutionary Liberal in the Second American Revolution: Comparing Karl Marx and Frederick Douglass in Real-Time* (Brill, 2024), 73-74.

[101] Weydemeyer was the most prominent as a key party leader in the U.S., but also Willich and Fritz Anneke. Nimtz, *Marx and Engels: Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*, 115, 159, 170. See further: Angela Zimmerman, "From the Rhine to the Mississippi: Property, Democracy, and Socialism in the American Civil War," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 5, no. 1 (2015): 3–37.; Karl Obermann, *Joseph Weydemeyer: Pioneer of American Socialism* (International Publishers, 1947).

[102] Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War*, 97. Importantly, Marx, Engels were focused on winning English-German workers' solidarity. Especially in England, where the textile capitalists were pressuring the British government to intervene on their (the South's) behalf; successfully organizing unemployed textile workers in England to the cause of the North was an achievement of the anti-interventionist movement. Nimtz, *Marx and Engels: Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*, 170-71.

democratic revolution, a necessary step in labor's long struggle against capital."[103] Contrary to other US socialists who saw abolition as a distraction from the 'real' fight, Marx and Engels saw the fight against 'Black slavery' and the fight against 'white slavery' (wage labour) as one fight.[104]

Importantly for our discussion in this chapter and this dissertation is that it was a conflict that, they hoped would be, a *revolutionary* force for the emancipation of labour from chattel slavery. The U.S. Civil War and the abolition of slavery was a very important event for Marx and Engels' thinking about war and revolution, race and capitalism. To this end, there are a few instances to point out.[105] Engels was at one point frustrated with the Union Army's refusal to conscript soldiers, among many other frustrations:

> And then, what cowardice on the part of the government and Congress! They shrink from conscription, from resolute fiscal measures, from attacking slavery, from everything that is urgently necessary; everything's left to amble along at will, and, if some factitious measure finally gets through Congress, the honourable Lincoln hedges it about with so many clauses that it's reduced to nothing at all.[106]

While it is a brief, unimportant comment from 1862, it indicates the straightforward point that Engels and Marx were concerned with military and political victory. Not a pacifist and not opposed to conscription per se – Engels clearly recognized war and conscription as necessary to this important struggle against slavery, a historical rather than ethical assessment of forced-service as domination.[107]

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[103] Nimtz, *Marx and Engels: Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*, 170.

[104] Nimtz and Edwards, *Communist and the Revolutionary Liberal*.

[105] Their letters show that they often differed in their predictions during the course of the war itself, for example, Engels' expressed many frustrations in a 1862 letter where he felt the Union had already lost and in his reply Marx disagrees. See in section 4 "McClellan or Fremont? Constitutional or Revolutionary War," of Marx and Engels, *Civil War in the United States*.

[106] Engels to Marx July 30 1862 in Marx, Karl. *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 41: Letters 1860-64*. Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, 387.

[107] This is notable as a difference to earlier moments in the history of radicalism: "Following the conclusion of the first English Civil War (1642–46), the Levellers, a popular republican movement composed of civilians and soldiers from the New Model Army, organized mass-based, principled opposition to impressment. Leveller petitioning initiatives in the late 1640s signed on hundreds of thousands of subscribers who supported the movement's demand to abolish conscription, along with other reforms calling for a democratic franchise, annual parliamentary elections,

They also discussed Black soldiers as potentially decisive. Although Black labour was essential, as deckhands, longshoremen, and woodcutters for the Union army, putting Black men into combat roles would take some time.[108] Marx wrote, " The North itself turned slavery into a pro- instead of an anti-Southern military force. The South leaves productive labour to the slaves and could thus take the field undisturbed with its fighting force intact."[109] Turning the war into a slave revolt was a major idea at the time among abolitionists and socialists, including German exiles and emigres.[110] Zimmerman says it was a "common observation that the rebellion depended upon the labor of the enslaved", citing a newspaper advocating a strategy where "the enslaved served not simply as capital whose liberation would undermine the slaveholding ruling class but also as participants in Union military strategy."[111] Said Marx, "The North will, at last, wage the war in earnest, have recourse to revolutionary methods and overthrow the supremacy of the border slave statesmen."[112]

Citing from the paper *Anzeiger des Westens*, Zimmerman describes the revolutionary self-emancipation of enslaved people themselves as it could be achieved through fighting in the war: "The active and armed participation of former slaves, moreover, would be as essential to emancipation as emancipation would be to defeating the Confederacy, for "no people has ever been lifted up to freedom. Freedom is not something that is given—it has to be taken." The "best preparation" for freedom "has always been a revolution or a war.""[113] Lincoln and the Union

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liberty of conscience, and the abolition of monarchy, the House of Lords, and the prerogative courts." Donoghue 2016, 21. Later on, the question of conscription's restoration would, according to Hippler, become a highly-debated nexus of French politics in 1818: "The question of military recruitment was linked to a whole set of more fundamental issues about the political order itself, and involved concerns about the nature of constitutional monarchy, about the content of citizenship and the rights and duties it implied, about the significance of political liberty and civic equality, and, even more fundamentally, about the very foundations of the social order and the structure of political power." Hippler, Thomas. "Conscription in the French Restoration: The 1818 Debate on Military Service." *War in History* 13, no. 3 (July 2006): 281. Wollstonecraft too criticized the impressment of sailors as enslavement.

[108] Dobak 2011, 4.

[109] Marx to Engels 7 August 1862 in Karl Marx, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 41: Letters 1860-64* (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 400.

[110] Zimmerman, *Rhine to the Mississippi*, 18.

[111] Zimmerman, *Rhine to the Mississippi*, 18.

[112] Marx, *MECW 41*, 400.

[113] Zimmerman, *Rhine to the Mississippi*, 18.

government discouraged enrollment of Black people in the Union army in the early years of the war, afraid of alienating the sympathies of the border slave interests.[114]

In the preface to the first edition of *Capital*, Marx wrote, "Just as in the eighteenth century the American War of Independence sounded the tocsin for the European middle class, so in the nineteenth century the American Civil War did the same for the European working class."[115] He follows this by noting how the European working class would be motivated by the emancipation of enslaved Black Americans, in chapter ten on the working day,

> In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralysed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black skin it is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new vigorous life sprang. The first fruit of the Civil War was an agitation for the 8-hour day – a movement which ran with express speed from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California.[116]

The conditions of production themselves, he says, are the soil the labour movement grows from: the abolition of slavery is the historical precondition for the struggle for the 8-hour working day in the U.S., representing a continuum of labour-power bought by the capitalist.

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[114] As stated in an official U.S. Army history of Black participation in the civil war: "During the spring and summer of 1861, few Northerners would have predicted that black people would play a part in suppressing the rebellion. This attitude would change within the year…" William A. Dobak, *Freedom by the Sword: The U.S. Colored Troops, 1862-1867* (Center of Military History, United States Army, 2011), 2.

[115] Marx, *Capital*, 91.

[116] Marx, *Capital*, 414. As said earlier, the militia is less important as an organizational type but as an ideological representation of democratic power. In Marx's vision – along with other socialists and abolitionists – this meant putting Black men into combat roles and politicizing around slavery. But of course, what this phrase evokes – Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black skin it is branded. – is the contrast between the idea/principle of universal struggle of international labour, black and white, and the following period of U.S. history. This period was marked precisely by the counter-revolution, as Du Bois would put it, to slave-emancipation and reconstruction, which included both racial hierarchy in the labor movement and unions and also was marked by white supremacist vigilantism and militia. Marx's phrase– his "emancipation"– is of course not describing only political rights or labor rights, which white workers could/can/do get at the expense of black workers, but emancipation from class society writ large; a classless society definitionally can't consist of classes defined by race. This history demonstrates the ambiguity of democratic-popular power; militia ideology represents core premises about who rightly wields power in society, and those premises can differ vastly: from Black soldiers fighting for emancipation to white supremacists fighting precisely against that. Importantly, the context for this reading was their argument against socialists who thought abolition was a 'side issue', as mentioned above. Nimtz and Edwards, *Communist and the Revolutionary Liberal*, 73.

3.2.1.2 In the Commune's Arms

The Paris Commune (18 March – 28 May 1871), the workers' insurrection at the tail end of the Franco-Prussian war (19 July 1870 – 10 May 1871), is symbolically significant in socialist and anarchist traditions, with a prolific set of heroes, martyrs, and a memory culture inscribed in popular culture as much as scholarship.[117] Importantly, for our purposes here, is this wildly dynamic episode's influence on Marx and Marxian thinking on the bourgeois state and the speculative socialist or communist-revolutionary class rule.[118] In the 1872 Preface to *The Communist Manifesto*'s German publication, he wrote, "One thing especially was proved by the Commune […] 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.'"[119] Crucially, the organization of armed force was at the centre of this. As well as bearing the distinction of the first worker's republic, these events were crucial in the history of internationalism – disturbing "the established order of rival nation-states in proposing a vision of international, working-class solidarity that cut across national boundaries," not least of all by the participation of Europeans without French citizenship in the Commune's

[117] Andrew Sloin, "Writing the Paris Commune in the Warsaw Ghetto." *Past & Present* 258, no. 1 (2023): 181–211.; Lause, *Soldiers of Revolution*; Owen Holland, *Literature and Revolution: British Responses to the Paris Commune of 1871* (Rutgers University Press, 2022).; "On France: Revolutions and Communes," in *Understanding Marx, Understanding Modernism* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 50–63.; Niklas Plaetzer, "Decolonizing the 'Universal Republic': The Paris Commune and French Empire," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 49, no. 3–4 (2021): 585–603.; Leipold, *Citizen Marx*.; "Marx's Social Republic: Radical Republicanism and the Political Institutions of Socialism," in *Radical Republicanism: Recovering the Tradition's Popular Heritage*, ed. Bruno Leipold, Karma Nabulsi, and Stuart White (Oxford University Press, 2020).; Massimiliano Tomba, *Insurgent Universality: An Alternative Legacy of Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2019).; Julia Nicholls, *Revolutionary Thought after the Paris Commune, 1871-1885* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).; Miloš Prelević, "Marx and Engels on the Class-Revolutionary and General Military-Strategic Contents and Character of an Armed Populace," *Politička Misao: Croatian Political Science Review* 3, no. 5–20 (1975).; Monty Johnstone, "The Paris Commune and Marx's Conception of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," *The Massachusetts Review* 12, no. 3 (1971): 447–62. One important debate is the competing reading of Marx on the idea of 'the social republic'. The revolutionary reading coming down on this as a definitive critique of the concept, and the socialist- or labour-republican readings coming down on the side of affirmation. For two examples, respectively, see Holland and Leipold.

[118] "State" refers to the bourgeois state, the political form of capitalist social relations. The political form of socialist revolution, an alternative 'state' and attendant questions of 'rights', 'government', are a matter of debate - so understate it. Instead of proletarian 'state', one might instead say dictatorship of the proletariat; removing the euphemistic language of 'state' for a clear articulation of the new class rule.

[119] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 194.

political structures and life.[120] Internationalism would remain a key theme in the militia debates on Marx's side of the German socialist movement especially.

Marx's definitive statement on the events of the Commune and its repression, *The Civil War in France* (1871), is also the most famous text containing his writing on soldiers, armed workers, and militia. Notably, in the Franco-Prussian War, Marx had counseled revolutionary restraint to French workers, to dissuade them of premature actions, but when the uprising began he was wholeheartedly invested.[121] As was the case in 1848, the National Guard (the volunteer citizen militia of the French Revolution) was essential: on March 18th the National Guard revolted against Adolphe Theirs' conservative government when it attempted to disarm them. Ten days later, the Commune was proclaimed. Marx writes that the Communards could only resist the siege of Paris by Prussian soldiers because the Commune abolished conscription and the standing army declared the National Guard the sole armed force, and all citizens capable of bearing arms were armed.[122]

> Paris could resist only because, in consequence of the siege, it had got rid of the army, and replaced it by a National Guard, the bulk of which consisted of working men.[123] This fact was now to be transforemed [sic] into an institution. The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people.[124]

Under siege, the Paris Commune needed to arm and defend itself cooperatively, and, "Paris mobilized as one man for resistance".[125]

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[120] Holland, "On France: Revolutions and Communes," 53.

[121] Nimtz, *Marx and Engels: Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*, 210-211.

[122] Friedrich Engels, "Introduction, The Civil War in France" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (Norton, 1978), 623.

[123] The accuracy of Marx's assessment as to the sociological make-up of the Guard – or indeed how to interpret "working class" is commented upon by Leipold, "Marx's Social Republic," 187: "For instance, in contrast to the army, it elected its own non-commissioned officers and junior officers, and units were recruited and organized locally. The siege of Paris had meant that the National Guard had grown spectacularly to 340,000 men, and it became the epicentre of local social and political life, providing working-class neighbourhoods with everything from a 'substitute workplace, provider of family income, political club . . . [and] recreation organization'."

[124] Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (Norton, 1978), 632.

[125] Engels, "Introduction, The Civil War in France," 622.

What makes the civic militia, or the armed people for that matter, different from the conscripted standing army? The National Guard – at 340,000 men during the siege – was the pre-existing civic militia of Paris, traditionally bourgeois, with roots in the French Revolution, "but its ranks had become increasingly composed of the working classes, and by 1871 was 'widely understood to be a democratic body of citizen soldiers' far removed from the 'army's authoritarian and militaristic traditions'."[126] Furthermore, the Guard's growth during the war had meant arms circulated among civilians more generally, allowing for the popular arming–including among women–that sustained the Commune. "The immediate context for the outbreak of the Commune," Bruno Leipold writes, "was thus a situation of 'local, democratic, armed organizations on an unprecedented scale.'"[127]

The standing army and conscription were removed not because the Commune did not need military functions. Marx identified something in the quality of the state's repressive apparatus itself, other than the violence-potential of 'repression' in the abstract, which was not neutral and available for working class self-government. Likewise, there was something distinct in the characteristics of the armed workers – primarily artisans and skilled workers, reflecting a similar social make up as the Commune's governing committee.[128] This substitution of the standing army for National Guard and armed workers implies that the role of manpower in an armed force is not merely a technical matter of numbers and training, of which efficacy could be an effect, but that *who* makes up that force is a key part of the institution, and importantly, not separated by class division with the provisional government of the commune. Workers held political power, including armed force; as Nimtz writes, "That and only that reality could be the basis for the realization of the more distant socialist goal."[129] This marked the new revolutionary nature of the Commune. Reflecting on 1848, Marx had said that "the next attempt of the French revolution will be no longer, as before, to

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[126] Leipold, "Citizen Marx: the relationship between Karl Marx and republicanism," 202.

[127] Leipold, "Marx's Social Republic," 187.

[128] Leipold, "Citizen Marx: the relationship between Karl Marx and republicanism," 184.; Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871* (Taylor and Francis, 2014), 111–13; David A. Shafer, *The Paris Commune: French Politics, Culture, and Society at the Crossroads of the Revolutionary Tradition and Revolutionary Socialism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 115.

[129] Nimtz, *Marx and Engels: Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*, 217.

transfer the bureaucratic military machine from one hand to another, but to break it, and that is essential for every real people's revolution on the Continent."[130] In 1871, he affirmed this in his explanation of the Commune. Nonetheless, throughout the fighting he, Jenny Marx, Engels and others abroad, were concerned with inadequate military organization, from fortifications that should be prepared, to "quarrelling".[131] Theirs sent the regular army to take Paris, initiating the Bloody Week of summary executions and deportations of Communard prisoners and suspected sympathizers, and fighting on the barricades until the last one fell on May 28.[132]

3.2.1.3 Critiquing the Gotha Programme

In Germany, 1875 marked the unification of the Ferdinand Lasalle's ADAV (Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein [General German Workers' Association] 1863-75) and August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht's SDAP (Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei [Social Democratic Workers' Party] 1869-75) into the SAPD (Sozialistischen Arbeiterpartei [Socialist Workers' Party of Germany]).[133] Reading the proposed party platform to unite the two parties, Marx and Engels, from abroad, made their critiques known in letters, later published in 1891 as 'The Critique of the Gotha Programme'. The programme passed in 1875 at the first party congress in Gotha. Importantly, for our purposes, it restated long-standing demands: "The Socialist Labor party of Germany demands as the foundation of the state: [...] Direct legislation by the people. Decision as to peace or war by the people. [...]Common right to bear arms. Militia instead of the standing army."[134] They seem like extreme demands next to the others: universal suffrage, limits on the

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[130] Letter to Kugelmann, quoted in Nimtz, *Marx and Engels: Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*, 212.

[131] Nimtz (*Marx and Engels: Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*, 214) writes that Jenny Marx wrote to Kugelmann on May 28 1871, "The lack of military leadership, the entirely natural distrust of everything "military"... the quarrels, irresolution and contradictory actions which necessarily result – all evils inevitable in a movement so audacious and so youthful … now I think all hope is lost… Another June 1848 massacre lies before us." I have not yet been able to locate the letter myself.

[132] Leipold, "Citizen Marx: the relationship between Karl Marx and republicanism," 184.

[133] Which in 1890 became the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) Social Democratic Party of Germany.

[134] "Volume 4. Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany, 1866-1890 Socialist Workers' Party of Germany, Gotha Program (May 1875)," German History in Documents and Images, https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/forging-an-empire-bismarckian-germany-1866-1890.

working day, labor rights enshrined in law, and freedom of association. But Marx's critique identifies these all as standard democratic demands of the time:

> Its political demands contain nothing beyond the old democratic litany familiar to all: universal suffrage, direct legislation, popular rights, a people's militia, etc. They are a mere echo of the bourgeois People's party, of the League of Peace and Freedom. They are all demands which, insofar as they are not exaggerated in fantastic presentation, have already been realized. Only the state to which they belong does not lie within the borders of the German Empire, but in Switzerland, the United States, etc. This sort of "state of the future" is a present-day state, although existing outside the "framework" of the German Empire.[135]

Indeed, as mentioned earlier, participation in militia (for some citizens) was a feature of both the French and U.S. revolutions, and as Marx states, contemporary states had militia as a part of their repressive state.

While the significance of Marx's critique for state theory far exceeds what can be included in this paper, it is notable for our purposes that this is a key articulation by Marx challenging the conception of state as a neutral instrument, particularly one that can be used to extract progressive reforms: Gotha treated the state "as an independent entity that possesses its own *intellectual, ethical and libertarian* bases", "instead of treating existing society (and this holds good for any future one) as the *basis* of the existing state (or of the future state in the case of future society)."[136] The political state rested upon a basis of society: in other words, social relations had as their political form, the capitalist state. The state was not an entity apart from society.

Marx's criticism here identified this as a demand made upon an authoritarian German Empire: the "party expressly declares that it acts within 'the present-day national state', hence within its own state."[137] All its claims, however, "rest on the recognition of the so-called sovereignty of the

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[135] Karl Marx, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 24: Marx and Engels 1874-83* (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 95.

[136] Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program," 94.

[137] Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program," 95.

people and hence are appropriate only in a democratic republic."[138] And since it does not demand such a republic (wisely, he says, given the state of repression), it should not also make demands upon "a police-guarded military despotism, embellished with parliamentary forms"—only suitable to a republic based on popular sovereignty, and furthermore attempt to persuade "this state into the bargain that one imagines one will be able to force such things upon it 'by legal means'."[139]

In an update on the Enlightenment version, the militia question is posed in two ways: first, by the Gotha Program as a demand on the (imperial) state for a more just organization of the armed force of the state towards the ends of social democracy or socialism. Marx's critique identifies this for what it shares with the bourgeois parties, albeit with the goal of socialism named in addition. While militarism and its variants (the military industrial complex) have endured in left discourse as a topic of interest and critique, the militia has not. The latter is crucial to understand and is connected to the former: militarism or imperialism describe exploitative and expropriative assaults on 'foreign' countries and people, its bodily, political, and economic violences, and their industrial bases, but the militia question identifies a democratic connection—or lack thereof—to the violent power of the state. As the militia question shows us, the *how* of militarism can point in the direction of democratic demands. In language, militia here both refocuses from offensive armed force to 'defense', and refocuses power, via firepower, into the hands of workers.

The second way is Marx's identification of the demand's misdirection. What sense does it make to demand this of the increasingly authoritarian, imperial German Empire? But his critique is also significant as an articulation of communism not being an ideal program, but a dialectical "movement" to abolish the state of things.[140] By emphasizing the essential theoretical omissions of the text—the basis of the state as it is in capitalist social relations—he points the principles of the document in a revolutionary direction. If we understand the state as an appearance of a social

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[138] Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program," 95.

[139] Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program," 96.

[140] See, for example: "Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "*German Ideology*," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (Norton, 1978), 162.

reality, of capitalist social relations, then the military cannot be taken over, reformed, or redirected—but the social relations that dominate everyone under capitalism must be abolished.[141] All the demands he critiques are either not possible, desirable, nor suited to the 'present-day state'; nor does the program call for the revolution that would bring the principles implied by the demands into being: "for all its democratic clang, [the program] is tainted through and through by the Lassallean sect's servile belief in the state, or, what is no better, by a democratic *belief in miracles;* or rather it is a compromise between these two kinds of belief in miracles, both equally remote from socialism."[142]

3.2.2 The Militia Question After Marx: The Second International and the Soviet Union (1895-1919)

Marx did not have the final word on the militia question. As with so many of his words, particularly on political matters that were not systematically presented in the fashion of *Capital*, these had lives of their own after his death in 1883 as Marxist socialism continued as a live tradition for political praxis. For the German social democrats, the question of militia remained relevant, intersecting with broader debates about the political movement often captured in the phrase 'reform or revolution'. In the early Soviet Union, the militia debate echoed the Enlightenment debates in their context of state formation but also took place in the context of other Soviet debates (such as in legal theory)[143] re/imagining institutions for a socialist society, of which military doctrine and organization were no exception, as well as debates over party politics and power. Particularly Engels' military and scientific writings were used in both Germany as an intellectual authority and in the Soviet Union to support either the view of military science as an enterprise that would hold for the Soviet Union as much as for the capitalist states or that the science itself was based in capitalist ideologies and that the revolution would require doing away with such fetters.

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[141] Rob Hunter, "The Capitalist State as a Historically Specific Social Form," in *Marxism and the Capitalist State: Towards a New Debate*, ed. Rob Hunter, Rafael Khachaturian, and Eva Nanopoulos (Springer International Publishing, 2023), 253–73.

[142] Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program," 97.

[143] Pashukanis is the most studied Soviet legal theoretician in the Anglophone world. Evgeny Pashukanis, *The General Theory of Law & Marxism* (Transaction Publishers, 2002).

Rather than be exhaustive in this section – this would require many more chapters – I establish a connection between these questions of post-Marx Marxism to their lineages. Especially where they are frequently decontextualized into questions of 'just war' and ethics of violence or the degeneration of Soviet socialism, I emphasize the longstanding themes of revolutionary-subjectivity, contests of power, and emancipatory horizons that we have seen so far in debates about the militia question.

3.2.2.1 Engels' late military critiques

A feature of Engels' writings is a political interest in soldiers. Certainly interested in humanity's technological creations, his interest has a more humanist character than is typically recognized and is critical of the technology-weapons fetish.[144] In *Anti-Dühring* (1887) he introduces, but does not define, the role of 'human material' in modern military innovation, referencing loyalties, motivations, employment arrangements, and class alongside physical strength, training, and discipline. Rather than 'simple' material, soldiers' social characteristics increasingly affect the qualities of their individual fighting capabilities, and are affected by the experience, too. Distinct from familiar military considerations, morale and unit cohesion, human material points us towards understanding that the cooperative organized mass is not solely a function of authority. Unlike machines, one soldier is not necessarily equal to another even when they have common training and command. Arguing against the 'myth of military genius', for example, he writes that,

> It is not the "free creations of the mind" of generals of genius that have had a revolutionizing effect here, but the invention of better weapons and the *change in human material, the soldiers*; at the very most the part played by generals of genius is limited to adapting methods of fighting to the new weapons and combatants.[145]

He identifies militaries as a site of politicization and training for workers in arms; as he had hoped for in the case of the English Volunteers. His interest in subjectivity has echoes of the republican cultivation of martial and civic virtues, however transformed as a kind of class consciousness that is the virtue of citizenship in the revolutionary project.

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[144] Shafer, "Rifle Theory."; "Engels after Frankfurt."

[145] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 230.

Engels also assesses the spectacular power of manpower – as in industry, as in war. In 1887, at the height of 19th-century colonialism, as empires competed economically and militarily to an unprecedented degree, Engels presciently wrote,

> Eight to ten million soldiers will be at each other's throats and in the process they will strip Europe barer than a swarm of locusts. The depredation of the Thirty Years War compressed into three to four years and extended over the entire continent; famine, disease, the universal lapse into barbarism, both of the armies and the people, in the wake of acute misery.[146]

He first predicted such a future war as the death knell of capitalism, but less than two years later, his outlook was that the revolutionary moment would be found in peacetime:

> [T]here will be 10 to 15 million combatants, unparalleled devastation simply to keep them fed, universal and forcible suppression of our movement, a recrudescence of chauvinism in all countries and, ultimately, enfeeblement ten times worse than after 1815, a period of reaction based in the inanition of all peoples by then bled white—and, withal, only a slender hope that bitter war may result in revolution—it fills me with horror. Especially when I think of our movement in Germany, which would be overwhelmed, crushed, brutally stamped out of existence, whereas peace would almost certainly bring us victory.[147]

As a close observer of colonial violence, particularly Africa, he noted the devastation of modern warfare's techniques and technology, seeing how European battlefields would in turn be devastated by such advancements – under no illusion that Europeans would be spared the violence visited upon the colonies. He identified not only individual workers but the movement for the revolutionary labour movement *itself* as imperilled by the prospect of world war.

In 'Can Europe Disarm?'[148] Engels considered a German bill to increase the numbers of soldiers in the military. He observed that the late 19th-century arms race in Europe was not only a matter of rapidly developing technologies of weapons, but also a labour question, in the extension of

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[146] Friederich Engels, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 26: Engels 1882-89* (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), xxix.

[147] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 48: Letters 1887-90* (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 139.

[148] Frederick Engels, 'Can Europe Disarm?' (1898) in *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 27: Engels 1890-95* (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 371.

conscripted age limits. Engels claims that "the system of standing armies" is widely thought to have gone too far, leading to economic ruin or exterminatory war or both – the costs borne by the international working class above all as soldiers and tax-paying civilians (the colonial experience indicated how in Europe too civilians would soon enough pay the highest price for modern warfare). His proposed programme of disarmament is therefore the sole lever he sees available: an internationally-regulated limit of terms of service and the transformation of European standing armies into "militia based on the universal arming of the people".[149] He proceeds – "from a purely military point of view" – to show how the standing army may be abolished "without jeopardising national security".[150]

In the preface to the volume of *Marx/Engels Collected Works* in which it is collected, the editors write: "While Engels was under no illusions as to the plan being accepted by the European powers, he believed that his proposals would provide Social Democrats with a new weapon for exposing the anti-popular militaristic policy of the ruling circles and serve to extend their influence."[151] Comparably, he proposed in 1887, a policy proposal for subversion within the Prussian army, by showing the conscripts of the rural proletariat "the way to end Junker and tenant exploitation; to put the means to do this in their hands; to set in motion the very people whose enslavement and stultification produces the regiments which are the foundation of Prussia; in short, to destroy Prussia from within at the root."[152] The means to do this however, was via the land question, a resolution to demand "the lease of Crown [lands] to co-operatives of rural labourers for common cultivation".[153] For his purposes, agitation within the army therefore was not solely for the

[149] Engels, *MECW 27*, 371.

[150] Engels, *MECW 27*, 371.

[151] Engels, *MECW 27*, 371.

[152] Friedrich Engels, *The Role of Force in History*, trans. Jack Cohen (Lawrence & Wishart, 1968), 24.

[153] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 23

particularity of its power, but in its role as an institution that a mass of the working population passed through: a source of *mass* power and consciousness.[154]

3.2.2.2 German social democrats debate the militia

The German labour movement's party was large and conflicted at the end of the 19th century, an enduring legacy of the 1875 unification. Max Schippel, of the ADAV side of the party, critiqued in two publications a longstanding feature of the SPD platform: the demand for militia, discussed above with respect to Marx and Engels' critique of the 1875 Gotha Programme two decades prior.[155] This debate speaks to a nationalist and internationalist split. Schippel argues in favour of German imperialism, which the standing army as a permanent and expeditionary force supports, to supposedly benefit German workers materially.

As Marx identified early, the Lassallean labour theory of value was not fit for a socialist party and its broader labour movement. Bourgeois ascription to labour as the source of all wealth, a labour*ist* view of politics, affirms labour as it is and merely claims for it a greater share of capitalist wealth. As the militia question shows us, the *how* of militarism, points us in the direction of actual critique rooted in historical understanding of labour. Should this or that labour – military or civilian – exist at all? Should all wealth, i.e. value, exist at all?

In 1899, Rosa Luxemburg penned "The Militia and Militarism" responding to Schippel. Her object of critique is, namely, the ideology that grounds his criticism of their demand for a militia:

> It is characteristic of all Schippel's claims that not only are they intrinsically wrong, but they are also based on the perspectives of bourgeois society. Thus, considered from a Social-Democratic viewpoint, everything that Schippel says seems to be upside down: the standing army is indispensable, militarism is economically beneficial, the militia is impracticable, etc.[156]

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[154] This continues what Nimtz identifies as Marx and Engels view of the necessity of alliance with peasants, the elimination of feudal modes of exploitation, which they compared the slave system in the U.S. to the land system in Prussia. Nimtz, *Marx and Engels: Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*, 240-41.

[155] Long-standing in the SPD as includes the preceding organizations.

[156] Rosa Luxemburg, "The Militia and Militarism," *Marxists.org*, 1972 [1899].

Luxemburg is a primary figure of the Marxist councilist movement of the early 20th century, where an entry point could be found on the militia question specifically, but most Marxist neo-republican writing today drawing on Luxemburg is focused on other aspects of social democratic concern.[157] Yet her writing on the militia has important implications beyond the historical question of the demands of a particular revolutionary grouping at the turn of the century if we want to use Luxemburg as a continued political and theoretical authority. She writes,

> The most general standpoint upon which Schippel bases his defence of militarism is his belief in the necessity of this military system [...] a standing army. And from a certain point of view he is quite correct. A standing army and militarism are indeed indispensable – but for whom? For the present-day ruling classes and the contemporary governments. Now what can one conclude from this other than that, from the class standpoint of the present government and ruling classes, doing away with the standing army and introducing the militia, i.e. arming the people, must appear to be an impossibility, an absurdity? And if Schippel, for his part, likewise regards the militia as an impossibility and an absurdity, then he is only revealing that he himself shares the bourgeois point of view on the question of militarism, and that he views it through the eyes of the capitalist government or the bourgeois classes. This is also demonstrated clearly in each of his individual arguments. He claims that to equip all citizens with weapons, which is a basic tenet of the militia system, would be impossible because there is not enough money for this. 'Culture suffers enough as it is,' he says. He bases his argument simply on the present Prusso-German public economy; he cannot imagine a different economy, for example one which makes use of progressive taxation of the capitalist class in order to finance the militia system.[158]

As in the 'Critique of the Gotha Program', Luxemburg identifies a theoretical not only moral problem with the Lasallean side of the movement represented in Schippel's arguments, who saw the Bismarckian state and the bourgeois parties as potential allies, and the capitalist state, even when governed by the most reactionary elements of the ruling class, as a given.[159]

As opposed to Engels, who had aimed to show the economic and military viability of the militia as a replacement for the standing army, Luxemburg argued that the militia was *not* viable in the

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[157] Muldoon and Booth, "Socialist democracy: Rosa Luxemburg's challenge to democratic theory."

[158] Luxemburg, "The Militia and Militarism."

[159] She makes related arguments against this wing of the party in some of her more famous and widely-read writings, such as 'Social Reform or Revolution'. See: Rosa Luxemburg, *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis. (Monthly Review, 2004), 128-168.

current state. She, and the left of the SPD, did not propose a militia so that imperialism could be more effectively undertaken. Its economic implications and its democratic implications were at odds with the contemporary German state, and this spoke in favour of the *militia form* for those who wished to undo the *substance* of the capitalist state: imperial exploitation and militarism. On the economic function of imperialism and militarism, she writes,

> Schippel considers the militarism of the present day to be economically indispensable because it 'relieves' the economic pressure on society. [...] Schippel has not taken up the matter as a Social Democrat, nor from the point of view of the working people at all. When he speaks of a 'release' of pressure, it is obvious that he is thinking of capitalism. And in this he is of course correct: for capitalism, one of the most important forms of investment is militarism; from capitalism's point of view, militarism is indeed a 'release' of pressure.[160]

And for the working class, she explains, the standing army does represent a profound economic 'release' but of *power* – and not by 'disarming' or by the will-less-ness Marx had described. Firstly, the military siphons off "surplus" populations – the reserve army of labour that puts downward pressure on wages and on workers' leverage in the workplace – at a price:

> He removes a competitor from the labour market only to see a defender of his wage slavery arise in his place; he prevents his wages being lowered only to find that the prospects both of a permanent improvement in his situation and of his ultimate economic, political and social liberation are diminished.[161]

Through "indirect taxes" the worker transforms his "competitor" into a soldier in the standing army, who in turn becomes "an instrument with which the capitalist state can contain, and if necessary suppress bloodily, any move he makes to improve his situation (strikes, coalitions, etc.)". This worker-turned-soldier is not only transformed from an economic competitor to a direct agent of repression but also becomes "the most solid pillar of political reaction in the State and thus of his own enslavement", as she identifies the ideological influence of the standing army in the body politic. From the point of view of capitalism as a world system, this is even more the case: the worker-turned-soldier acts not only as this pillar of his own oppression 'at home' but in

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[160] Luxemburg, "The Militia and Militarism."

[161] Luxemburg, "The Militia and Militarism."

the naturalized arena of international (or colonial) war, divides the global proletariat into nations not by borders or national economies but by uniforms.

Importantly, for her critique, Luxemburg considers the development of the military as a political force. The modern standing army "based on universal and compulsory conscription vis-à-vis the former enlisted army and feudal army" was a significant progressive development of bourgeois society, not a discovered ideal form. She writes of her critic, "He still approaches it from the point of view that it is the same great step forward ... But here the development stops as far as Schippel is concerned; history does not progress beyond the standing army, except for a further extension of universal conscription."[162] She continues and returns to Engels specifically as an authority both claimed by her and her critics[163] as justifying their diverging approaches to the new Militia Question:

> whereas we share Engels's view that the logic of the development of militarism into the militia must entail the dissolution of militarism, Schippel believes that the people's army of the future will grow of its own accord, 'from within' the present military system. Whereas we, supported by the material conditions given us by the objective development (namely the extension of universal conscription and the decrease in the length of service), aspire to bring about the militia system by means of political struggle, Schippel relies on the intrinsic development of militarism with its consequences, and brands as fantasy and hot-house politics every conscious intervention aimed at effecting the militia.[164]

What is described here is a divergence in socialist theory and practice, one approach believing in the necessity of active political agitation and organization, and the other an inevitablist theory of socialism, where the (separate) forces and relations of production, left to their own development, will produce socialism.

The Marxist interest in organizing within the army, or advocating for a militia to replace it, as represented here by Engels and Luxemburg can appear extreme from the present-day. But they

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[162] Luxemburg, "The Militia and Militarism."

[163] Schippel's texts rely on Engels in the title even: "Did Friedrich Engels Believe in the Militia?" and "Friedrich Engels and the Militia System". I have not yet been able to locate these texts in their entirety.

[164] Luxemburg, "The Militia and Militarism."

were certainly not advocates for violence or insurrection for its own sake or revolutionary agitation for the sake of resistance or disruption. They were always concerned with success and construction rather than pure action or destruction.

In the first world war, Luxemburg would articulate in her 'Junius Pamphlet' precisely this devastation as it came to pass 20 years after Engels' wrote about it. Writing from prison amid World War I,

> But for the advance and victory of socialism we need a strong, educated, ready proletariat, masses whose strength lies in knowledge as well as in numbers. And these very masses are being decimated all over the world. The flower of our youthful strength, hundreds of thousands whose socialist education in England, in France, in Belgium, in Germany, and in Russia was the product of decades of educational and propaganda, other hundreds of thousands who were ready to receive the lessons of socialism, have fallen, and are rotting upon the battlefields. The fruit of the sacrifices and toil of generations is destroyed in a few short weeks, the choicest troops of the international proletariat are torn out by the life roots.[165]

The hopes for the future, the masses, civilian and uniformed, were dead. The education Luxemburg describes echoes Marx's sarcastic commentary on the will-less regular army – "a fine school in which to bring up the republicans of the future!" – but in the inverse. Writing fifty years apart, the thread of praxis, schooling of socialists or soldiers, runs from one to the other.

3.2.2.3 The Soviet Militia Question (1905-1919)

The militia question in the Soviet context was very different from what the Western European social democrats had to contend with. Nonetheless, the fundamental questions were raised again: what is the relationship between military and politics, in a revolutionary, insurrectionary mode and later as the leaders of a new state with ambitions to an entirely new mode of political and social life? These debates came to a head at the Eighth Party Congress in 1919 and are often recounted by historians in reference to the "Military Opposition". The longstanding historical reading, to generalize, is that the Military Opposition group (a diverse and politically varied group) "opposed Trotsky's plans for a Red Army that would employ traditional discipline and make use of former

[165] Luxemburg, *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, 340.

tsarist officers,"[166] and "one of a series of intraparty opposition movements, which were attempting to preserve the revolutionary ideals of democracy against the encroaching authoritarian tendencies of the Leninist party."[167] Thus the question of the militia – that is, the organization of labour of the armed forces to the end of realizing socialism – was a crucial one.

3.2.2.3.1 Soldiers in the Revolution(s)

In 1917, on the relationship of the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland to the World War, Lenin identified subversion within imperialist armies as a viable political strategy.[168] Because mass armies were necessary for this imperialist war, he argued, this opened the possibility of "creating the conditions for the elimination of imperialism by strengthening Social Democratic propaganda in the army" via those very masses. The Russian Revolution's success in 1917 was crucially aided by the soldiers who joined the cause – a lesson learned from the 1905 revolution's failures. Just before Tsar Nicholas II's March 1917 abdication and the creation of a Provisional Government, socialists established the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, with more local soviets soon being established across the empire. It was composed of representatives, one per thousand workers and one per military company. It functioned as a "second government" or "dual power" opposite the Provisional Government. Lenin wrote, "alongside the Provisional Government, the government of the bourgeoisie, another government has arisen, so far weak and incipient, but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is growing – the Soviets of

[166] Nicholas Valentine Riasanovsky and Mark D. Steinberg, *A History of Russia* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 504. For a classic account in line with the above: Robert Vincent Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (Simon and Schuster, 1969). For a revisionist account, see: Gayle Lonergan, "Where Was the Conscience of the Revolution? The Military Opposition at the Eighth Party Congress (March 1919)," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (December 2015): 832–49.

[167] Lonergan, "Conscience of the Revolution," 834.

[168] Soviets first emerged in 1905 in St. Petersburg to coordinate strikes and socialist-revolutionary activities: striking workers formed the Soviet of Workers' Deputies. After 1905, soldiers were subjected to isolation by authorities to cordon them off from the influence of revolutionary propaganda and agitators. Soldiers already carried moral stigma and limited civil rights. Mark Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Cornell University Press, 1990), 14.

Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies."[169] The powers of these dual powers were highly asymmetric in degree and type, as Toscano writes, modelled after the Paris Commune,

> the power wielded by the soviets is incommensurable with that of its bourgeois counterpart, however 'democratic' it may be, because its source lies in popular initiative and not parliamentary decree, because it is enforced by an armed people and not a standing army, and because it has transmuted political authority from a plaything of bureaucracy to a situation where all officials are at the mercy of the popular will and its power of recall.[170]

To paraphrase Toscano, the Leninist tradition envisions the Petrograd Soviet of 1917 as an embryo of workers' power, or state *in potentia*, based on the direct initiative of the masses, demanding a preceding collective identity of class belonging that it mediates and intensifies through the new institution.[171]

3.2.2.3.2 Marxism, militia, and military science

For Lenin, the importance was not to find the ideal Marxist form of military organization, but the form and substance of power that could deliver a successful revolution. In 1916, in his writing against disarmament and pacifism, he raised the idea of the militia to critique it: "the oppressor class is always armed. Not only the modern standing army, but even the modern militia - and even the most democratic bourgeois republics, Switzerland, for instance - represent the bourgeoisie armed against the proletariat." He reorients the reader away from form *as such* as a solution to militarism and imperialism in the capitalist states, saying,

> On the question of a militia, we should say: We are not in favour of a bourgeois militia; we are in favour only of a proletarian militia. Therefore, 'not a penny, not a man', not only for a standing army, but even for a bourgeois militia, even in countries like the United States, or Switzerland, Norway, etc.[172]

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[169] Vladimir I. Lenin, "The Dual Power," *Marxists.org*, 1964 [1917].

[170] Alberto Toscano, "After October, Before February: Figures of Dual Power," in Fredric Jameson, *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*, ed. Slavoj Žižek. (Verso, 2016), 218. See further: Vladimir I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (Penguin, 1992).

[171] Toscano, "After October, Before February", 218.

[172] Vladimir I. Lenin, "The Military Program of the Proletarian Revolution," in Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War*, 169-176.

Lenin here is in many ways evoking the tension of arms in bourgeois revolutionary traditions by emphasizing the crucial question of not militias or arms in general, but the matter of *who* holds that power in their hands, literally. In revolutions where the bourgeoisie and the proletariat or peasants were on the side of revolution against the ancien regime, the question of who in the coalition had "rights" to arms was a tense one in a class-divided society. In the U.S. and in France, "the question of whether or not there was a right to bear arms was less important than the question of who had the right to bear arms," as Noah Shusterman has put it;[173] a question that came up clearly in the U.S. Civil War and why Black soldiers were potentially revolutionary in the view of Marx, Engels, Douglass and others, as discussed above.

For Lenin, demands he *could* support would be more particular than declarations of universal rights. Instead, they include:

> popular election of officers, abolition of all military law, equal rights for foreign and native-born workers, [...] the right of every hundred, say, inhabitants of a given country to form voluntary military-training associations, with free election of instructors paid by the state, etc. Only under these conditions could the proletariat acquire military training for itself and not for its slave-owners.[174]

What is clear here is that the form of organization of armed force is not irrelevant to Lenin, but tied to the substance of that armed force or power – in *whose* hands will power accrue for the class struggle in such a way that it may actually be for the purposes of developing towards socialist revolution and then communism.

Lenin "criticized the Bolshevik Military Organization's attempt at an uprising in [the July Days in 1917]" on the basis of their prematurity.[175] Trotsky too emphasized the correct preparation for an insurrection should the balance of forces favourable to one's success emerge in the course of struggle.[176] No insurrection was better than a failed insurrection. What was crucial for Lenin was

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[173] Shusterman, "Strange History of the Right to Bear Arms," 453.

[174] Lenin, *Marxism and the Science of War*, 169-176.

[175] Egan, *Dialectic of Position and Maneuver*, 54.

[176] Egan, *Dialectic of Position and Maneuver*, 55.

the development of their leadership within the Petrograd Soviet and Petrograd garrison's troops; the Petrograd troops' mutiny and support of the Bolsheviks would end up being crucial to the revolution's initial success.

Ten years previously, writing amid the 1905 (1906) revolution, Lenin had reflected on the speed with which practice runs ahead of theory, and the lessons learned from the failures. One in particular concerned the confrontation with modern soldiers. "That we must work among the troops goes without saying," but he observed that they would not come over to the side of the people by "persuasion" or "convictions" alone.[177] Rather, the popular movement will inevitably lead to wavering among the soldiers, and this is when the physical "fight for the troops" begins. He describes the lengths that the government fought for the troops: by appeals, flattery, bribes, vodka, lies, threats, confining, disarming, or violent removal. The revolutionaries have to engage in this fight next time, he argues.

Lenin also identified another importance to the militia question beyond pragmatism or direct force. Politically, the education in political activity of soldiering was crucial. In April 1917, writing from exile, he

> argued that the Bolsheviks should organize a proletarian militia linked organically to the Soviets to 'fight for bread, for peace, for freedom' to serve as a bulwark against counter-revolution, and to provide 'a real means for educating the masses so that they might be able to take part in all the affairs of the state'.[178]

Rather than a prefigurative type of political activity, of which the militia represents an ideal, the form of the militia would allow for training for the actual activity of proletarian revolution and rule itself.

Trotsky wrote about how the military superiority of insurgents over state soldiers in a direct confrontation was unrealistic when it comes to physical strength. The significance of the clash was actually a matter of consciousness. He wrote, "The first task of every insurrection is to bring the

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[177] Vladimir I. Lenin, "The Lessons of the Moscow Uprising of 1905" in Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War,* 206–213.

[178] Lenin in Egan, *Dialectic of Position and Maneuver*, 54.

troops over to its side," echoing the longer tradition of Marxist interest in soldiers' role in the revolution.

> The chief means of accomplishing this are the general strike, mass processions, street encounters, battles at the barricades. The unique thing about the October revolution, a thing never before observed in so complete a form, was that, thanks to a happy combination of circumstances, the proletarian vanguard had won over the garrison of the capital before the moment of open insurrection. [It] [...] had fortified this conquest through the organization of the Garrison Conference. It is impossible to understand the mechanics of the October revolution without fully realizing that the most important task of the insurrection, and one of the most difficult to calculate in advance, was fully accomplished in Petrograd before the beginning of the armed struggle.[179]

Soldier's revolutionary role, in Trotsky's telling, emerged from the class composition of the garrison. As the Marxists we have discussed have shown, the mass character of the modern soldiery means that the majority of soldiers share in the proletarian or working class character of the revolutionaries' political ambitions. Importantly, the *whole* army is not available for revolutionary consciousness. Internal divisions are consequential, Trotsky continues,

> The overwhelming majority of the garrison was, it is true, on the side of the workers. But a minority was against the workers, against the revolution, against the Bolsheviks. This small minority consisted of the best trained elements in the army: the officers, the junkers, the shock battalions, and perhaps the Cossacks. It was impossible to win these elements politically; they had to be vanquished. The last part of the task of the revolution, that which has gone into history under the name of the October insurrection, was therefore purely military in character. At this final stage rifles, bayonets, machine-guns, and perhaps cannon, were to decide. The party of the Bolsheviks led the way on this road.[180]

While the impossibility of direct military confrontation has been described since Engels, here we see the complication involving first the groundwork of political organization within the armed forces to weaken the mass of its manpower. The remainder was then still superior in training, in political commitment to the regime, as well as having the advantage of materiel. But their social bases mattered too, Trotsky writes,

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[179] Leon Trotsky, "The Art of Insurrection," in *The History of the Russian Revolution*, 1930.

[180] Trotsky, "The Art of Insurrection."

> The possessing classes constituted the social force of the other camp. This means that they were its military weakness. These solid people of capital, the press, the pulpit – where and when have they ever fought? They are accustomed to find out by telegraph or telephone the results of the battles which settle their fate.[181]

The political inactivity of these classes recalls the republican civic virtue that the division of labour imperiled. While efficient, perhaps, for the state under the Tsar, it left a political vulnerability for the bourgeoisie under the circumstances of 1917 as the lower classes refused to serve their role. He continues,

> The younger generation, the sons, the students? They were almost all hostile to the October revolution. But a majority of them too stood aside. They stood with their fathers awaiting the outcome of the battle. A number of them afterward joined the officers and junkers – already largely recruited from among the students. The property holders had no popular masses with them. The workers, soldiers, peasants had turned against them. The collapse of the Compromise Parties meant that the possessing classes were left without an army.

What Trotsky's narration of the events of the Russian revolution in the armed forces shows is that the 'soldier' is not a neutral entity, or a purely patriotic or professional one, but one with a class content. The 'soldier' already has a class character in his social relations within and without the army. I will return to this in the following chapter (chapter four) on social reproduction and structural basis of such class content.

The mutiny of soldiers of a key regiment, declaring their shared aims with striking workers and thus refusing to fire upon them, followed by other regiments, was arguably the decisive moment of the February Revolution (1917).[182] The Petrograd Soviet recognized this in Order No. 1 and the Provisional Government with the Declaration of Soldiers' Rights. Victories for the soldiers were "full civil and political rights, promises of improved living conditions, and the right to elect soldiers' committees that would decide certain matters of military life."[183] The revolutionary behaviour in 1905 was a surprise for revolutionaries and theoreticians of radical, democratic, and

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[181] Trotsky, "The Art of Insurrection."

[182] Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship,* 13.

[183] Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship,* 14.

socialist stripes, who had paid little attention to the revolutionary or solidaristic potential of soldiers, sometimes analogized with peasants, based on the experiences of 1848 and 1870 of regular soldiers putting down revolutions across Europe.[184] The military authorities had class analyses that aligned with the Bolsheviks in certain ways, though with differing conclusions: they saw peasants as the most reliable fighters, considering urban conscripts, students and workers particularly, as potential destabilizing revolutionaries.[185] They protested, for example, at the political authority's insistence on punishing convicted revolutionaries with army service. In the lead-up to 1917, Bolsheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries had made sustained ideological efforts in the army and navy, recognizing increasingly the similarities between factories and the military, and the tangible oppression of tsarist authority in the form of lengthy and totalizing conscription and in military hierarchy, communal living, rank-solidaristic practice and beliefs, etc.[186] Soldiers' committees became places of intensified political radicalism, and demands grew for peace, demobilization, the power to elect officers, and to put all decisions to a vote; in January 1918, soldiers' committees were, on their own authority, demobilizing entire units.[187]

What of the new Red Army? What of an armed force in a new country with an ambition to transform the very social relations that have shaped its history and the international forces representing those capitalist social relations that it would necessarily have to fight off? Who was this soldier? What form would these forces take?

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[184] Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship,* 15.

[185] Military conscription was the hammer with which Nicholas saw to modernize Russian people in ways that echo how more advanced capitalist-industrialized countries often saw wage-labour. In Russia too there was a particular racial/ethnic dimension and unevenness, particular regarding the incorporation of Jews into the Imperial state: "Yet some differences between Jews and non-Jews applied: most significantly, Jews were required to provide conscripts between the ages of 12 and 25, whereas for others the conscripts were between 18 and 35. This system betrayed the utilitarian agenda of the law; to make Jews productive, the military had to draft those still susceptible to external influence." Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, "Military Service in Russia," in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (YIVO, 2023).

[186] Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship,* 16-17.

[187] Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 16-17.

3.2.2.3.3 Military Opposition: Principles and Class Power

Early Soviet debates (notably the Eighth Party Congress in January 1919) raged over the extent to which democratic, socialist principles *could* obtain in the military of a new revolutionary state in a hostile geopolitical and local environment.[188] There were several issues at hand: divergent interpretation of Marxist texts and thinkers, particularly Engels' 1878 attempt to systematise a Marxist theory of war in *Anti-Dühring*, to which later efforts to construct a 'proletarian military science' would refer.

The early Soviets (or councils) of soldiers and workers articulated the council-democratic claims upon their labour processes at work, but also contributed to the governing of the early Soviet Union.[189] This was an effort at institutionalizing the worker-claims articulated in class struggle, in a civic-republican vein of cultivating political virtues of participation. This network of soldiers and workers' councils that coexisted with a provisional government are the paradigmatic examples of 'dual power', as Lenin described them in 1917, though the *soldiers* in soldiers and workers councils tend to be downplayed today.[190]

Militias were present already at the moment of the Revolution's initial success. Red Guard militias of armed workers had played a crucial role in the overthrow of the Provisional Government, their numbers reaching 200,000 in 1917, and they supported "beleaguered soviets in provincial cities".[191] There were already advocates for converting the Red Guards "into a genuine people's militia" in 1917, and various efforts at organization toward this ideal, such as an All-Russian Collegium to Organize a Worker-Peasant Red Army, and expression of these ideals in the Declaration of the Rights of the Laboring and Exploited of the Third Congress of Soviets in 1918: these "sanctioned the arming of all laborers, the formation of a socialist Red Army of workers and

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[188] Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War*.

[189] For its Cold-War characteristics, Semmel's book provides a solid overview of key primary texts of Lenin, Trotsky, etc. on the development of the Red Army and the militia-versus-regular debates and accordance with revolutionary principles and geopolitical necessity. Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War*.

[190] Jameson, *An American Utopia*, 4.

[191] Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 14. See also: 'Epilogue' in Rex Arvin Wade, *Red Guards and Workers' Militias in the Russian Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 1984).

peasants, and the complete disarming of the property-holding classes."[192] There was an investment in this ideal from socialist soldiers themselves, even when military needs became clearly at odds with the democratic structure: "For rank-and-file soldiers, the committees symbolized their gains in the Revolution. They were unwilling to surrender those gains even in the name of military expediency."[193]

During the Civil War (November 1917 – June 1923), "systematizers" attempted to construct an Engels-inspired proletarian science of war or unified military theory, affirming and inspired by the guerilla strategy and tactics of the civil war.[194] They included Michael Frunze and Marshal Tukhachevsky and apparently Stalin. Frunze argued that the military strategy of the Soviet Union "must be specific to the class relations that define a particular social formation," and "must be built in the direction of a maximum closeness to the ideals of Communism".[195]

Opposed to these efforts was Trotsky's "empiricism" or "pragmatic military policy".[196] Trotsky saw military affairs always in relation to the forces they would be facing; thus the Red Army should be focused on military superiority rather than discovering a 'proletarian military science'. The systematizers saw Trotsky's approach as suspicious and bourgeois; he embraced defensive 'positionalism', which critics found insufficiently Marxist and instead favoured attack and manoeuvre.[197] Daniel Egan recounts, "Trotsky did not reject Engels' argument that military strategy and organization would take on new forms in socialism, but emphasized that this could happen only after Soviet Russia had moved beyond its present state of economic and cultural

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[192] Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 9.

[193] Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 15.

[194] Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War*, 22.

[195] Summarizing Frunze, then quoting Frunze: Egan, *Dialectic of Position and Maneuver*, 75.

[196] Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War*, 22.

[197] Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War*, 22, 46. In Semmel's telling at least, there is a clear association with Trotsky's defensive approach as "effete" (Semmel's word), such practices included constructing or defending fortified positions. (22)

underdevelopment."[198] Trotsky asserted: "I maintain that our military doctrine begins with this, that we have to tell the Red Army man; learn to grease your boots and clean your rifle".[199] Emphasizing that the guerilla form of civil war fighting and its successes had not been "derived from Marxist doctrine, as Frunze insisted, but grew out of the character of a civil war, and the backwardness of Russian society and the Red Army,"[200] they were circumstantial, not dogmatic.

In 1922, Trotsky wrote a critique of Frunze, whose 'proletarian doctrine' he compares with the feudal Suvorov's 'Science of Victory' to find Frunze's efforts a poor copy. But Trotsky does not critique it on the basis that "the laws of war are eternal" or that Marxist analysis has nothing to offer the study of war and the military. He identifies two key differences between Suvorov's "feudal army under the command of officer-nobles" and the Red Army of the 1920s. First is the soldiers themselves: "in one case you have a feudal army, kept in darkness. Here [in the Soviet Union] you have an army that is revolutionary, whose consciousness is growing." Second is the difference of military objectives: "We are undermining everything that Suvorov defended. But this difference involves not a military doctrine but a class political world-outlook. [...] In his social doctrine Suvorov rested on two poles: gauntlets and 'God is with us.' In their place we have the Communist program and the Soviet constitution".[201] He disagrees with the idea of deducing a military science or doctrine from Marxism, while at the same time not denying Marxism as the "scientific method of orientation".[202] He compares the army to a factory:

> To think that by arming oneself with the Marxist method it is possible to solve the question of how to organize production in a candle factory, is to understand nothing either about the Marxist method or about a candle factory. Meanwhile, an army regiment from the standpoint of its own specific tasks is a factory that must be correctly organized, that is, in harmony with its purpose.[203]

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[198] Egan, *Dialectic of Position and Maneuver*, 75.

[199] Trotsky in Egan, *Dialectic of Position and Maneuver*, 75.

[200] Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War*, 47.

[201] Trotsky in Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War*, 80-82.

[202] Trotsky in Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War*, 57-59.

[203] Trotsky in Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War*, 80-82.

According to Frunze, "our military system derives wholly from the specific class nature of the proletarian state," this method Trotsky calls "scholastic and hopeless". Strategy and tactics are derived from geographical and technological factors, and other considerations any military would make. "The class nature of the proletarian state determines the social composition of the Red Army" just as the nature of the Tsarist state, based on class divisions and divisions of labour, determined the composition of the Tsarist army. It also determines the "political world-outlook", "aims", and "moods". This has an "indirect influence" on military strategy and tactics, they are not deduced or derived from the proletarian character.[204]

Von Hagen recounts organizing efforts by workers and soldiers' committees and other organizations to establish a socialist army or Worker-Peasant Red Army as the first dilemma of the "new political class". He identifies the dilemma between the radical democratic "goal of popular participation and socialism," that we discussed at the outset in the context of Marx's early writings, and "a disciplined fighting force… needed to preserve the political order that would usher in full-blown socialism."[205]

The Red Army was founded on 28 January 1918, and tension between the Army and the Guard grew problematic for the government.[206] Following counter-revolutionary activities among Czech soldiers, the initial peace of the revolution was shattered, and the civil war began in earnest; "the army shed its volunteer principles and became a genuine conscript fighting force."[207] The government nonetheless still envisioned the army of the first socialist state to be a different kind. This ambition was reflected in language: replacing "officer" with "military specialist" and "soldier" with "Red Army man", and pervaded the army and not just the party intellectuals: "the hostility among revolutionary soldiers toward the old military order" was such that "as late as 1925

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[204] Trotsky in Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War*, 59-61.

[205] Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 10. Also: John Erickson, "Some Military and Political Aspects of the 'Militia Army' Controversy, 1919–1920," in *Essays in Honour of E. H. Carr*, ed. C. Abramsky (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1974), 204–28.

[206] Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 13.

[207] Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 33.

a writer who used the term "barracks" was condemned for evoking the drill-sergeant and officer-caste values that no longer could be tolerated in a worker-peasant Red Army."[208] Writing in 1972, Blyley recounted how the regular army was superior to the militia system and a necessity for the Soviet Union. He claimed that while discipline is essential to all armies, "discipline in the Soviet Army differs radically from the discipline in the armies of exploiter states" based on "intelligence, loyalty and devotion" and not violence.[209]

In Lonergan's reading of newly published party minutes from the Eighth Party Congress (March 1919), the most influential dissent and conflict within the party seems to have been not ideologically oppositional, but rather a matter of military organization disfunction for commanders, who were struggling on the front with two problems: army class composition, namely peasant conscripts with high rates of desertion and rebellion; and to a far lesser extent, growing military autonomy due to military specialists (tsarist officers) leading to a greater threat of Bonapartism. The stakes were the party and the state, and therefore the revolution, losing control of the military arm of the state.[210] As Lonergan argues, "The concern here was how to build and maintain discipline among the peasant conscripts. The attitude toward discipline reveals much about the change in the party's position as the civil war took hold and exposes the contradictions inherent in this social-democratic party running a standing army of the traditional type."[211] It was an early effort to make the military more party-minded, and bring this state institution under the control of the Central Committee.[212]

The left opposition story that historiography has pushed does pose an important set of ideas: the Bolsheviks had encouraged syndicalist-democratic participation in the Provisional-government-

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[208] Citing E. Brunak, " 'Kazarmennoe' stroitel'stvo," Voennyi vestnik 35 (1925): 17." Von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, 12.

[209] Byely in Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War*, 191.

[210] Lonergan, "Conscience of the Revolution," 838.

[211] Lonergan, "Conscience of the Revolution," 840.

[212] Lonergan, "Conscience of the Revolution," 848.

era military, encouraging 'conscious discipline': the idea that orders *can* be discussed at all.[213] The push at the Eighth Party Congress away from popular-militia ideology toward hierarchical discipline of a regular army was for the party to maintain control over a key state institution. The insight from the Paris Commune was not the *people*-in-arms over an organized standing army, but organizational forms that mustered the power *and* class consciousness needed for proletarian class rule. In the Commune, the standing army represented the reactionary elements that for the Soviet party congress the peasant recruits represented.

3.3 Conclusion

I propose the militia as a useful tool for critique of soldiering labor, highlighting the capitalist social relations at its core and the class struggles that can ensue. From the Enlightenment to the Red Army, the militia embodies the ambivalence of popular, democratic, and syndicalist ambitions in the abstract, and traces the shift of revolutionary politics from bourgeois liberalism to proletarian socialism.

Militias reflect ideals of popular power and sovereignty, and are thereby easily implicated in the kind of public that is envisioned: including highly inegalitarian, oppressive ones maintaining the oppression that their society is premised upon. Militias in the 19th century represented a particular expression of claims on power. It took place in the realm of 'defense' or military affairs, but for socialists, nationalists, revolutionaries, republicans, and other popular political traditions, it represented greater claims to (differently defined) democratic power. Ideologically, it embodies a conception of a 'people' or constituency. This form's essential feature is mass cooperative power, a feature it shares with standing armies. Advocacy for one or the other represents much larger claims on the conquest of or defense of political power in a given conjuncture. Militias offer much wider possibilities for political power, theoretically available for bolstering state power as well as for challenging or contesting it. They therefore represent much more than two politically neutral

[213] Lonergan, "Conscience of the Revolution," 844. In future research for this project more extensive study of the Soviet military debates will require digging into the historically and symbolically significant 1921 Kronstadt insurrection of Soviet sailors and marines suppressed by Soviet soldiers under Trotsky's orders. It represents in many ways the split between a syndicalist-anarchist strain of militia thinking and the Red standing army that had emerged by the end of the Civil War.

forms of ‘national defense’ and their technical advantages or pathologies. Rather, they represent core premises about political life and who wields power over it. Through the militia form we can observe the problem of social relations that are the substance of what is to be “secured” or “defended”, identifying the historical particularity of any military form.

The militia is ideological; in bourgeois republican tradition it functions in the complexity of the capitalist state to reconcile minoritarian (bourgeois) class rule with the ideals of democracy and equality (of propertied men) and be a bulwark against ‘tyranny’ of the sovereign or of the popular classes. A key feature of it is in the realm of virtue, character, and subjectivity: to maintain martial masculine character that can justify and uphold social hierarchies of race, class, and gender. In the radical republican and later socialist tradition, we see a continuation of this in a new political register. The transformation into “guerilla” or “rebel” became historically more significant than a debated transformation into militiamen, perhaps because such terms were not so ambiguous about their revolutionary program. Being armed, literally holding power in the hands of the workers, was an expression of popular sovereignty, but also held the premise that holding power was a part of the subjective transformation to build revolutionary power, to self-emancipate. We are familiar with this premise in other forms of political participation: most significantly in labour organization and action. The Marxist legacy of the militia question, was not conceived as a final form for the armed force of a social republic, but a mode of political organization that was educative as much as utilitarian and transformative for a new society where these people might rule and free themselves.

Chapter 4
The Soldier and the Structure of Social Reproduction

> Whenever a GI thinks he has caught up on the dishes and can sneak a smoke, the cooks tell him to mop the floor. The floors are mopped a dozen times a day.
>
> –Andy Stapp, GI activist, 1970[1]

4 Introduction

The military, like the family, appears to lie outside the subordination of use-value to value.[2] It should be possible therefore, that any labour that takes place in these spaces, would be organized for the pursuit of the goals of the institution, or the values of the household: children and adults are bathed and fed for reasons internal to the family (health, love, cultural expectation), weapons maintained and inspected for reasons internal to the military (preparedness and discipline), rather than to realize value through exchange of that product (a clean child or a functioning rifle). This is, partly, true. These institutions do not in fact produce value and are not consciously organized around that. However, this does not mean that they are not impersonally dominated by the value form. The household, as we know it in capitalist society, it has been argued, is a historically specific capitalist form. The military and the soldier are also such forms.

Both of these institutions, the state and the family, and the questions of their autonomy from or determination by production or the economy remains a source of debate in Marxist theory.[3] As

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[1] Andy Stapp, *Up Against the Brass* (Simon and Schuster, 1970), 63–64.

[2] Value, in the Marxist sense, should not be confused with normative value. In the second section 'Value in military-work' this will be explained more.

[3] The state variably stands in for or is conflated with 'politics' too. Smith argues that it is the relationship between "politics" and "economics" that is the biggest point of incompatibility between liberal egalitarianism (representing Rawls, Habermas, and other key figures) and Marxism. Smith, *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism*, 69-70. On the Marxist 'state debates', see: Clarke, *State Debate*; Hunter et al., *Marxism and the Capitalist State*. The family here also represents the debates about domestic labour, social reproduction, that will be discussed in this chapter, but more significantly gender specifically and difference and differentiation broadly. For a short and helpful overview of the feminist-Marxist relationship in light of post-structuralism: Amy De'Ath, "Hidden Abodes and Inner Bonds: Literary Study and Marxist-Feminism," in *After Marx: Literature, Theory, and Value in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Christopher Nealon and Colleen Lye (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 225–27.; Martha E. Giménez, *Marx,*

discussed in previous chapters, I see the state as the political form of capitalist social relations, and one continuously shaped by class struggle, and value as deeply shaping labour that does not produce it itself. I see the labour of the state, and the soldier in particular, as a way into the question of the capitalist forms of politics and capitalist forms of social reproduction. Particularly, the soldier as a worker challenges the fetishized form of separate political/economic life not only by revealing the proletarianization, the wage form, and other capitalist 'economic' forms that shape this realm of politics and the state, but also the household (*oikos*) characteristics of soldiering labour that demonstrate the totality of the capitalist economy, household, and state.

This project considers soldiers as members of the working class. At a cultural and market level, it may seem obvious that soldiers are working-class people subjected to the compulsions of capital and employed by the state, with many performing work similar to other occupations or industries. However, as discussed in previous chapters, it would be inconsistent with the methods of this dissertation to conflate cultural and market relations with the relationship between labour and capital. We do not want to assign 'positions' to individuals, but rather understand the reproduction of the working class, and the relations of expropriation and exploitation unique to capitalist society.[4] In many ways the determination of whether a person or group can be categorized in a particular class is less important than what one intends to do with that determination once reached. The intention is to inform our understanding of the soldier vis-a-vis value. This will help to explain the soldier's implication in the impersonal domination of capital and capitalist social reproduction, how class constitutes the capitalist state and how labour takes the mystified form of military power. The political particularity of subject-formation and of solidaristic relations following from them cannot be located at this same general level of inquiry. In chapter five we will consider a historical episode of soldiers' re-imagining of the international working class and the role of their work and life in it.

Labour-power is not just the capacity to labour; in a society divided into classes it has a specific class-meaning: "labour-power refers to the capacity of a member of the class of direct producers

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Women, and Capitalist Social Reproduction: Marxist Feminist Essays (Haymarket Books, 2019).; Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*.

[4] Gerstenberger, "Bourgeois State Form Revisited," 153–155.

to perform surplus-labour appropriated by the ruling class."[5] Reproduction of labour-power as a concept, therefore, refers to the daily and generational maintenance and renewal of this class.[6] The military has a relationship to the broader structure of social relations: its employees, including soldiers, officers, and generals, are recruited from civilian classes reproduced (in part) by the private family household and in part by the institutional-household of the military itself. That soldiers' activities (and thus the military) are situated within broader capitalist social relations is a banal but key fact of capitalist societies – these are not the warriors of Plato's *Republic*.[7]

Since, in this project, I seek to make sense of the soldiers' apparent contradictions as the 'body' of the state's monopoly on violence, and to learn what this tells us about class struggle, in this chapter I aim to bring into view the multiple labor processes at play in soldiering and how they inform our understanding of class and the capitalist military form. I first argue for a conceptualization of the working class as a capitalist entity that accommodates the soldier and his contradictions, as introduced in chapter two. This is a general[8] conception of the working class built on the concept of primitive accumulation and the separation from the means of reproduction as constitutive of capitalist social relations, as advanced by Open Marxists, and on Marxist Feminist theories of re/production, value, and domestic labor.[9] I discuss the labour processes in the military setting, including household production and domestic labour, considering them in the totality of reproduction as shaped by capitalist mediation of labour. This only partly answers my question however, because a shared commonality provides capital and the state with a class of

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[5] Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 148.

[6] Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 148.

[7] In the United States today, research indicates that coming from a 'military family' – having at least one close family member who has/does serve – increases the likelihood of joining the military. Mark Thompson, "Here's Why the U.S. Military Is a Family Business," *Time*, March 10, 2016. Functionally, one might be able to argue that the military via parental wage produces new military employees in this case. This would be quite a poetic but inaccurate understanding of the mediation of the wage and the separation of the private household from the state/military.

[8] General meaning 'social' - where in these total social (inclusive of 'economic') do they fit; and consequently how I think of the working class overall is clarified. i.e. not just 'sociological' or 'economic' in a way implying straightforwardly determining the political.

[9] Kirstin Munro, "The Capitalist Form of Household Production: Subsidy, Anachronism, or Something Else?" *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics* 27, no. 1 (2025): 261–70.

people compelled to organize their existence around the wages-for-labour, but it does not provide a ready subjectivity for revolution nor any particular political subjectivity.[10]

4.1 Domestic Labour and Social Reproduction

Social reproduction refers to the complex unity of production and reproduction: the reproduction of society as a whole. In the tradition I draw from and in my usage it refers to the totality of reproducing capitalist society, which in a Marxist understanding is not separate from production but includes both production and daily and generational reproduction as a part of social reproduction.[11] Marx, limited as his account is12, indicates that money-payment levels (an input of necessary labour) available to different sectors of the working classes should be sufficient for the purchase of commodities needed for the continued reproduction of their class (not for individuals), so that the specific commodity labour-power continuously appears on the market:

> Labor power exists only as a capacity, or power of the living individual. Its production consequently presupposes his existence. Given the individual, the production of labor power consists in his reproduction of himself or his maintenance. For his maintenance he requires a given quantity of the means of subsistence … the value of labor power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of the laborer … The owner of labor power is mortal. If then his appearance in the market is to be continuous, and the continuous conversion of money into capital assumes this, the seller of labor power must perpetuate himself … by procreation. The labor power withdrawn from the market by wear and tear and death, must be continually replaced by, at the very least, an equal amount of fresh labor power. Hence the sum of the means of subsistence necessary for the production of labor power must include the means necessary for the laborer's substitutes, i.e. his children, in order that this race of peculiar commodity owners may perpetuate its appearance in the market.[13]

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[10] The historical material condition of separation from the means of re/production, the proletarian condition, constitutes class relations but not the historical form of struggles. Simon Clarke "The Global Accumulation of Capital and the Periodisation of the Capitalist State Form" in *Open Marxism 1*, 152.

[11] To the point, Munro writes, "In correct Marxist usage, 'social reproduction' refers to the reproduction of society as a whole, rather than one element of society, and when Marxist-feminists such as Lise Vogel, Martha Gimenez, and others, refer to 'social reproduction' this is the sense in which they use the term. Furthermore, one must identify precisely what sort of society is being produced." Kirstin Munro, "Social Reproduction," in *Marx: Key Concepts*, ed. Riccardo Bellofiore and Tommaso Redolfi Riva (Edward Elgar, 2023), 211.

[12] See Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, on the limits, for example.

[13] Marx, *Capital*, 171-2.

Social reproduction in soldiering labour includes both paid unproductive labour (the job of training for and executing tasks ranging from the banal to the administrative to the violent) and the labour for daily reproduction that takes place also in the live-in employment setting. Settings outside the private household are under-analysed as a setting of social reproduction.[14] Using this scope allows us to grasp all the concrete work that needs to be done, and how policy and social changes can rearrange it between job categories, institutions, and in and out of paid work, and grasp it as both the terrain and outcomes of class struggle.[15] In discussing examples of the 'socialization of socially necessary labour', Lise Vogel considers education and health functions of the state as the socialisation of domestic labour – work is done collectively rather than privately by bringing it into public concern and responsibility.[16] This may allow for a more sober assessment of the dynamics of capitalism's necessary conditions, along with the denaturalization of certain tasks as 'properly' familial or not.[17] Tasks of domestic labour can and do exist in state, household, combined or corporate (waged) forms – including the military. Neither the public or private 'spheres' *necessarily* are more humane executors of these goods and services by the fact of being public or private (what they look like requires politicization) and it is useful to explore how work is performed in settings obscured by or excluded from ideologically-hegemonic ideas of household, family, and 'care' work.

'Social reproduction' has come to be popularly redefined in much narrower terms, and inconsistently, sometimes as referring to the totality of daily and generational reproduction done within the private family household, sometimes as referring to domestic labour exclusively,

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[14] While this is not the main project of my dissertation, it is a contribution I make to Marxist Feminism, and how this account is unique among explications of the military in capitalist society.

[15] The concrete labour processes under discussion are not sufficient to grasp the household production in capitalist society, nor capitalist production, nor capitalist social reproduction. To grasp the historical specificity of these forms, their capitalist forms, we must appreciate the commodity form and labour combination therewith.

[16] Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 162

[17] Likewise Beverley Best discusses Indian residential schooling in Canada as total socialization of social reproduction or "factories of assimilation" - a clear example of how tasks of domestic labour (cleaning etc.) and child rearing and education and health can and do exist in state, household, combined or corporate (waged) forms, and none of these 'spheres' *necessarily* are more humane executors of these goods and services by the fact of being public or private, or productive or unproductive of value. Beverley Best, "Wages for Housework Redux: Social Reproduction and the Utopian Dialectic of the Value-Form," *Theory & Event* 24, no. 4 (2021): 911–912.

sometimes as ‘care work’, ‘life-making’, or child bearing and rearing (biological reproduction).[18] As Vogel writes, ‘reproduction’ has, since the debates of the 1970’s, acquired a ‘generic’ meaning[19] and domestic labour, the originating site of theoretical inquiry in the 1960’s, quickly grew elastic and unstable.[20]

Total social reproduction is of course related to the activities invoked (“daily maintenance and long-run replacement”) by the generic feminist ‘social reproduction’; the latter is a condition of the former.[21] The working-class household, the site of such activities, is essential to capitalist social reproduction, defined as the reproduction of capitalist society: the “divisions of labour that compel and constrain activities of people within society as a whole”, not just in the ‘formal economy’.[22] This means that by perpetuating these forms of organization, capitalist society as a whole is reproduced. The family is an ideological, cultural, political question because it is the key site of the reproduction of classes and therefore a society with classes of people: “dominant classes somehow harness labour-power’s ability to produce use-values for their own benefit.” The class that provides that “labour-power capable of producing surplus” is tasked with the reproduction of that labour-power, that singular commodity they own and can sell, and it also is in fact borne by their own bodies, minds, and persons, even though as a commodity it is “distinguishable from the bodily and social existence of its bearer” – hence its distinction from slavery.[23]

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[18] Kirstin Munro, “‘Social Reproduction Theory,’ Social Reproduction, and Household Production,” *Science & Society* 83, no. 4 (October 2019): 451–68. See also chapter 13 of Giménez, *Marx, Women, and Capitalist Social Reproduction.*

[19] Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 196–7.

[20] Vogel’s overview of this theoretical history is very helpful (*Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 183–198). Marxist Feminists resist the generic reformulation not out of rejection of the frequently feminist claims attached and deployed in the diffuse usages of emotional labour, social reproductive labour, care work, etc. but because the concept labour has a unique and specific role in Marxian critique of political economy, and theorizing, for example, domestic labour, has been a decades-long enterprise requiring precise analysis of value production and circulation. The generic concept tends to be used ahistorically, rather than for the key contribution and aim of Marxian thought, to show what is specific about capitalist social relations.

[21] Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 187-8.

[22] Munro, “‘Social Reproduction Theory,’ Social Reproduction, and Household Production,” 456.

[23] Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 187-88.

The working-class household is therefore a crucial part of understanding the soldier's role in capitalist society and relationship to value. Absent the ideal-typical commodity-producer role, we are afforded the opportunity to set our gaze more broadly at where else the value form is in play. As will be discussed, I consider the household to not only be the private family household the soldier may come from and be connected to outside the military institution, but I also consider the institution-household setting of the barracks (or camp, or ship) as a site where a specific section of the working-class reproduces itself. This is a vantage point from which to analyze the military-industrial complex, one that emphasizes the neglected space of labour-power internal to the military's power-capacity-production itself as a site for inquiry into capitalist social relations.

In doing so, I elucidate how this form takes place in the context of the military and what class analysis on soldiers ought to take on board. This allows me not only to argue how and why agents of state violence may be considered a part of the working class in certain circumstances, but also to clarify what is a historically specific capitalist form of the military. The labour process, rather than being a privileged site of freedom or a site of moral recognition, is a *potential* site of political subject formation to resist, rebel against, and ultimately overcome, and is a potential site of class struggle and critique.[24]

4.1.1 Household production

The working-class household is a crucial part of understanding the soldier in capitalist society. Inspired by Vogel's approach to social reproduction in capitalist society and Kirstin Munro's recent economic theoretical framework for household production,[25] I build upon these and other works here to help theorize working-class soldiers in capitalist society. In doing so, I show how soldiers are structurally similar to all workers, both shaped by the foundational condition of primitive accumulation and value form.

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[24] This will be elaborated upon in chapter 5.

[25] Munro theorizes an interdependent three-sector model with sectoral production processes, combining Marxist Feminist work on unwaged work and capitalism with a critical adaptation of a neoclassical economic theory of household production.

Depending on the historical moment, soldiers may be a part of a working-class household: one or more persons living together in a shared dwelling who share responsibilities for meeting one another's needs daily, encompassing a multitude of potential kinship and living arrangements.[26] As Vogel notes, daily and generational reproductive labour do not only take place inside what we popularly conflate with the 'home' or 'family': "Working-class families located in private households represent the dominant form in most capitalist societies, but domestic labour also takes place in labour-camps, barracks, orphanages, hospitals, prisons, and other such institutions."[27] The real contribution of Marxist Feminism is a deepened explanation of the capitalist form of household production.[28] This insight is not in fact tied immutably to 'gender' and can therefore be used as a tool of inquiry in a historically masculinist environment like the military of the capitalist state to understand this setting of specifically capitalist forms of household production.[29] For soldiers at various points in history, the working-class household they are a member of may be a household of one single person; of a soldier with a spouse and children or other dependents who are financially tied and may live together for a period of time; or of many soldiers housed in barracks, on-base housing, private rented accommodation off-base, or even military prison. Any of these arrangements may be considered to be a working-class household because, most importantly, they are the sites in which "the domestic component of necessary labour" takes place.[30]

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[26] Munro, "'Social Reproduction Theory,' Social Reproduction, and Household Production," 454 fn 2; 461.

[27] Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 159. Vogel does not herself, however, theorize these institution-households specifically.

[28] Munro, "The Capitalist Form of Household Production," 267.

[29] The tendency to reify the (ideologically hegemonic) family and household in the nuclear form and 'traditional' man-woman relations of domination/subordination without empirical referents, is an ongoing one in the Social Reproduction Theory offshoot of Marxist Feminism and Socialist Feminism with troubling tendencies for bioessentialism, including in recent years the explicitly transphobic turn of one of the major touchstones of this literature, Silvia Federici noted by De'Ath ("Hidden Abodes and Inner Bonds") and Munro ("Capitalist Form of Household Production"). It has prompted Munro, for example, to de-emphasize gender with respect to her fieldwork, given that the nuclear family form is empirically a marginal one. Vogel (*Marxism and the Oppression of Women*) on the subject: 188-189.

[30] Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 158-59.

Expropriation, exploitation and domination are inherent to capitalist society's organization and processes of production and reproduction; capitalism presupposes them and constantly brings them into being. Unwaged domestic labour is but one input into the household production process and the reproduction of labour-power but one output.[31] Rather than the household being a sector outside of capitalism, contributing to or being exploited by the system yet not implicated and merely the object of its horrors, the household is systematically tied to the dynamics of production and reproduction in capitalist society overall, and thus demands theorizing which reflects that. The household, the state, and capitalist firms "are inextricably linked to one another via their own processes of production and reproduction, with these processes shaped by the imperative of endless accumulation,"[32] and these cannot be disentangled from the others.

4.1.1.1 Military-household production

The state, household, and firm rely on one another for inputs and outputs, such that household reproduction is essential to capitalist production, and vice versa. We can build from Munro's three-sectoral model a model of a military production process, drawing particularly on both her understanding of state production and household production, and we can deduce an abstract military production process as well, one with state elements and household elements that interacts with all sectors.[33] Munro's model is adapted from neo-classical economics and is intentionally abstract and implicitly modelled on a 'national' economy. It is important to consider here, even in this abstract presentation, how this model integrates into this broader dissertation that not only conceives capitalism as an international whole, but is concerned with an institution central to that international reality and premise of international (economic and political) social relations.[34]

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[31] Munro, "'Social Reproduction Theory," Social Reproduction, and Household Production," 452; Paddy Quick, "Labor Power: A 'Peculiar' Commodity," *Science & Society* 82, no. 3 (July 2018): 386–412.

[32] Munro, "'Social Reproduction Theory," Social Reproduction, and Household Production," 454.

[33] Munro, "'Social Reproduction Theory," Social Reproduction, and Household Production."

[34] Clarke, "Global Accumulation of Capital."

The primary output of the military production process above is the capacity for coercive force. At an abstract level, coercive force is a combination of cooperatively organized labour-power applied to a variety of tools (weapons, vehicles, etc.) directed to attempt to compel an opposing force to one's will. Soldiers apply their labour-power with others in a cooperative process that produces a force bigger than the sum of its parts. Even as the 1942 U.S. Military field manual will go on to discuss the intricate procedures of displaying flags on floats or automobiles and affective dispositions[35], it is all for the bigger purpose:

> The ultimate purpose of all military training is effectiveness in battle. In modern combat, only well-disciplined troops exercising cooperative and coordinated effort can win. Without discipline, a group of men is incapable of organized and sustained effort. With discipline comes the feeling of true comradeship that permits the individual to forget himself and act only for the best interests of the group.[36]

In this production process which involves affect, dress, hygiene, but also combat, the soldier is but one labour-power bearer of the total military production process, and as introduced above, into this production process go a variety of inputs.

The military uses inputs from working class households (labour-power in the form of soldiers and numerous other military job categories, the distinctions between which are often blurry, and taxation for military budgets), from other parts of the state, and from capitalist firms (a whole range of commodities and private infrastructures).[37] These firms and households and state inputs for state A's military, may derive from A's sectors, but also B's, C's, and so on. The trade of arms and other commodities and services is the most apparent example of B (firm)-to-A (military) inputs.

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[35] "Cultivate the habit of-looking for and emphasizing the brighter side of things, and you will have cheerful subordinates. A well-placed witticism or joke obtains an immediate response from the American soldier." U.S. War Department, "Basic Field Manual: Military Courtesy and Discipline," United States Government Printing Office, June 15, 1942. National Institutes of Health, 37.

[36] "Basic Field Manual," 2.

[37] See, for example: Adem Y. Elveren, *The Economics of Military Spending: A Marxist Perspective* (Routledge, 2019).; *Heterodox Economics of Military Spending* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2025).

The military also produces outputs to be used as inputs in other sectors' production processes: money-pay and welfare benefits[38] (food and housing benefits, tuition, insurance services, etc.) are transferred to households; protection services, contracts, and subsidies go to capitalist firms (including sometimes labour-power and/or qualification of labour for future surplus-value-extraction); and infrastructures are built. For example, commercial airlines have depended greatly on the U.S. military for pilot training in the past, which represents a military input into the production process of private firms. Another example is the service of non-citizens in many militaries, whose pay represents a military input in household production in the soldier's 'home' country and/or 'host' country.[39] However, the military is not merely a sub-section of the state, as it combines these state-sectoral qualities with household production, albeit in that institutional setting.

As a part of working-class household production processes, soldiers contribute to accumulation processes and therefore capitalist social reproduction via the purchase of commodities with money-pay, which are necessary to the household production process's output: survival and renewed labour-power for continued reappearance on the market.[40] This involves both reproducing oneself and others on a daily basis, combining purchased commodities with unwaged domestic labour and state infrastructure and state benefits, as well as the waged work of others external to the household.[41] Even if a soldier is a physically-absent private family household member, the remittance (cross-border or otherwise) of money to the household is essential to the household

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[38] The 'benefits' much ideologically touted from the start of the volunteer force by the U.S. military marketing and popular cultural understanding of military service in a country with a notable lack of welfare relative to other countries (rich or poor, capitalist or otherwise) are 'deferred wages' or pay 'in kind'. As Banaji writes, in a different context, "the wage-contract itself can be organised in different ways (under different labour systems), for example, as sharecropping, labour tenancy, or various forms of bondage, once we extend the notion of wages to include payments in land, housing, etc." and cites Marx on miners in Britain. "They receive cottages and coal for firing 'for nothing' - i.e. these form part of their wages, paid in kind". Jairus Banaji, *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation* (Haymarket Books, 2011), 154.

[39] Service in the U.S. military may make one eligible to apply for naturalization. "Naturalization Through Military Service." 2023. Government website. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

[40] Munro, "Capitalist Form of Household Production," 266.

[41] Munro, "'Social Reproduction Theory," Social Reproduction, and Household Production," 456–460; Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 157–162.

production process, and the reproduction of the other members daily and generationally; the wage is an essential part of necessary labour in capitalism for the exploited classes. Furthermore, soldiers themselves carry within them the primary output of the working-class household production process: the commodity labour-power (capacity to labour) embodied in the worker's person. The household uses the varying inputs (wages, commodities, state services, unwaged domestic labour) and ultimately produces labour-power through intermediate goods and services the household may produce, such as education, health, etc.,[42] which are then inputted into the production processes of capitalist firms and the state, in this case, the military specifically.

While the military production processes are oriented toward the final goal of production of capacity for coercive force, militaries also produce *intermediate* goods and services that are integral to their internal production process. Older theories saw the household as a site of consumption, primarily, but "households do not consume either commodities or state inputs directly to satisfy their wants and needs."[43] These intermediate goods and services are essential; commodities like weapons do not produce coercive force capacity by their purchasing alone. Weapons require maintenance and training of labour-power.[44]

Collectively, and combined with other working-class households, inputs into the household combine to reproduce the working class as a whole.

> [H]ousehold members *must transform these commodities* into the goods and services enjoyed by household members via a household production process. […] Goods and services produced in the household for household members include comfort, cleanliness, nutrition, safety, health, education, entertainment, and cultural or religious training. Seen this way, the commodities purchased with money from waged work represent *derived demand* — they are desired not for their own sake, but as inputs into the household production process of the final-use goods and services enjoyed by household members. *These final-use goods and services are*

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[42] Munro, "'Social Reproduction Theory," Social Reproduction, and Household Production."

[43] Munro ,"'Social Reproduction Theory," Social Reproduction, and Household Production," 462. See also Munro, "Capitalist Form of Household Production," 265; Batya Weinbaum and Amy Bridges, "The Other Side of the Paycheck: Monopoly Capital and the Structure of Consumption," *Monthly Review* 28, no. 3 (1976), 88–103.

[44] Even nuclear weapons famously whose main coercive effect is deterrent i.e. just requires existence not deployment, require intense maintenance and other intermediate goods and services to produce deterrent capacity. 'Credible commitment' must surely include credible technical labour capacity.

> *themselves intermediate goods*. According to Quick (2018), the household does not produce just use-values, but rather the intermediate goods and services akin to the intermediate goods produced by a firm that serve as inputs into the final product it sells.[45]

Such intermediate goods are produced and must be produced for the working class to perform in the way it should in a given configuration of re/production. Incidentally, they as individuals may desire to be clean or educated or to have the experience of cleaning or learning, just as one might take on the imperatives of capital in and of themselves as a reality principle to pursue "success".[46] The temptation therefore may be to see these as use-values independent of the relationship to capital, where capital appropriates the neutral or 'good' products of the 'non-capitalist' sphere of the household, or where the household (or women per se) subsidize capital and value creation.[47] What is important, however, is to appreciate that domestic labour is not productive of surplus value, and that the type of life being made is that of the exploitable class – in this case, a segment thereof put to the labour of political violence. That the individuals performing this work or being worked upon by others benefit from it as individuals at a personal or market level, is secondary. The inputs and outputs of the state and the firm into the household, whether the family-home or the barracks, must be acknowledged and thus so must the *capitalistic* purpose of household production. "In capitalism, it is 'no longer possible to distinguish exactly what constitutes a compulsory activity and what constitutes an existential expression of life.'"[48]

The household labour process itself may be important for several reasons in the military.[49] First, disciplinarily: cleanliness is often important to discipline in the military, which is about not only submission but cultivating a kind of virtue and cooperative responsibility. For example, a 1942

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[45] Munro, "'Social Reproduction Theory," Social Reproduction, and Household Production," 462. Emphasis mine.

[46] A parent like the ideological state apparatus may want their child to be a successful bearer of a saleable, desirable labour-power commodity (or 'human capital' to use a popular non-Marxist phrase).

[47] Critique of the subsidy thesis, see: Munro, "Capitalist Form of Household Production."

[48] Munro ("Capitalist Form of Household Production," 266) uses this excellent (translated) quotation from Roswitha Scholz.

[49] These are other than their use-value production/consumption, and I don't include here individual-personal meanings or desires.

U.S. officers manual, instructs officers on 'Care of Men', including on matters of 'reception', mess, uniforms, health and sex hygiene.[50] On mess (dining facilities or food itself), it instructs:

> The health and happiness of men depend to a very large degree on the quality of their mess. All organizations receive the same *rations*, but the best *meals* are served in those whose officers take the trouble to see that the food is properly prepared and served. Frequent inspections should be made of kitchen and mess hall, and all company officers should frequently eat in the company mess. When things are going well, don't forget to commend the mess personnel—spur them on toward further improvement. The serving of a hot meal in the field very often requires ingenuity and trouble on your part but, as a means of sustaining morale, it has no equal.[51]

Beyond the use-value of being fed, even the satisfaction of hunger and comfort that all human beings require has a particular significance to discipline into the organization.[52] The institutional form of the military in this way makes apparent the connection between labour and living that is abstracted and mystified by the wage form, and the separation of spheres of production and 'home', and politics. If soldiers are not fed, they cannot produce; in capitalism specifically, to be fed, workers have to produce for a wage that they can combine with their domestic labour to survive and continue to sell their labour-power.

Commodities other than labour-power are additional outputs. Commodities include of course weapons and vehicles, as well as uniforms, fuel, cleaning supplies, food, medicine, computers and communications technologies, and construction and mechanical supplies produced by capitalist firms.[53] To procure all this requires the input of state revenues from taxes, from firms and

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[50] Health and hygiene have always been imbricated in the military with anxious ideas of 'civilization', demarcating boundaries, and racial and gendered violence. Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (University of California Press, 1990).

[51] U.S. War Department, "Basic Field Manual," 39. Emphasis in original.

[52] The are other co-phenomena of military life that I would not call work, but are also significant to the work: friendship, confidence, a sense of belonging; antagonism, humiliation, a sense of failing; this emotional-social landscape is useful for political-ideological formation, towards integration into the institution (family or military), alienation from it, and even political-ideological consciousness or rebellion.

[53] For a wide-ranging historical look at military labour, see Zürcher, *Fighting for a Living*. See also, for example, on U.S. military construction in the Cold War, see: Gretchen Heefner, "Building the Bases of Empire: The US Army Corps of Engineers and Military Construction During the Early Cold War," in *The Military and the Market* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 105–19.; Benjamin D. Weber, "The Strange Career of the Convict Clause: US Prison Imperialism in the Panamá Canal Zone," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 96 (ed 2019): 79–102.;

households via the administrative state and government, as well as state debts and private speculative investment. They may also require the input of paid work by workers from capitalist firms as contractors and indirect private service provision in local economies, including illicit economies.[54]

I have discussed how the working-class soldier participates in the household production process already. Putting the conventional private household associated with the 'family' aside for a minute, and focusing exclusively on the military environment, we see how the unpaid household and paid state production processes can blur. As discussed above, while coercive force is the output that the labour process is organized around, military organizations also produce other goods and services, not least of which are consumed internally. Employees and residents (and employee-residents) in institution-households (militaries, prisons, medical facilities, etc.) likewise produce intermediate goods and services that are integral to the internal production process. These can encompass similar activities like personal maintenance, laundry, cooking, and teaching, and can produce services or goods such as discipline, cleanliness, or education.

All these inputs (labour-power, commodities other than labour-power, internally-produced goods and services, etc.) vary in intensity at given points in time and by location and may be complements and substitutes for the others. For example, cooking may be done by soldiers themselves at various ranks; or it may be done by civilian military employees; or it may be done by workers from a contracted firm, or coerced or unfree labour. In one historical period soldiers may have themselves constructed a fortification upon arrival at a site, while in another period the military may contract a firm to construct a fortification years in advance. There are certain tasks or work that have to get done to either reproduce labour power or any other specific desired outcome; the state or capital may be indifferent to the question of how this is accomplished, or they may not.

Reena N. Goldthree, "'A Greater Enterprise than the Panama Canal': Migrant Labor and Military Recruitment in the World War I–Era Circum-Caribbean," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 13, no. 3 (2016): 57–82.

[54] The literature on sex work economies around military bases has been significant in International Relations and other fields for broadening understandings of the social entanglements and inputs for militaries. Famously, Enloe 1990. For a recent contribution see: Kara Dixon Vuic, "A Girl in Every Port? The US Military and Prostitution in the Twentieth Century," in *The Military and the Market*, ed. Jennifer Mittelstadt and Mark R. Wilson (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 87–104.

Famously in *Capital* the question of daily and generational reproduction is of great concern to workers and a matter of indifference for capital – but capitalists may care a great deal in a given period,[55] or the state may care a great deal legislating 'private' affairs in some moments. But on the whole, it is a matter of indifference to capital how labor-power comes to be available, for as long as it is available the system can continue; "the circumstances and outcome of the processes of reproduction of labour-power are essentially indeterminate or contingent.[56] Capitalists, segments of the capitalist class, and the state (as a vehicle for this purpose), care about control over labour-power, and so an employee's ill-health, for example, may be of concern if it interferes with the smooth extraction of surplus value.[57] Such variation in cultural standards for how labour-power is produced has affected militaries as well and may occur for a huge number of reasons and generally, "will depend on customs, habits, expectations, culture, and the availability of resources."[58] Likewise in the military these are all variables we can expect to see, especially when it comes to the resulting standards of living. Conditions for soldiers that were once accepted as a part of the job would be seen as mistreatment today (due to general raising standards of living, norms, advances in medicine, and so on).[59] But we could also expect to see other influential variables that are more organizational and political in character.

For example, during the Clinton administration in the United States, state services, civilian and military, were subject to mass privatization. With respect to military personnel welfare services like housing, healthcare, counselling, "contracted military support services grew steadily in the

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[55] Famously, the Ford Motor Company's Sociological Department's deep involvement in worker's personal lives. See: Clarence Hooker, "Ford's Sociology Department and the Americanization Campaign and the Manufacture of Popular Culture Among Assembly Line Workers c.1910—1917," *Journal of American Culture* 20, no. 1 (1997): 47–53.

[56] Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 149-50. Munro ("Capitalist Form of Household Production") usefully lays out the two major theorizations of labour-power productions – i.e. the debates around productivity of domestic labour and "social reproduction" – subsidy or relic, both of which she argues against.

[57] For an impressive historical study see: Nate Holdren, *Injury Impoverished: Workplace Accidents, Capitalism, and Law in the Progressive Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[58] Munro, "'Social Reproduction Theory," Social Reproduction, and Household Production," 462. On need, see: Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, chapters 10 and 11 particularly; Ágnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx* (Verso, 2018).

[59] On issues like mortality, fertility, etc. see: "Population and Capitalism" in Giménez, *Marx, Women, and Capitalist Social Reproduction*.

1990s, increasing from about 30 percent of all military contracting in the late 1980s to nearly 45 percent by 1999, when they matched or exceeded total military spending on products (weapons, materiel) traditionally the bulk of private military contracting."[60] Privatization affects institutions' functions and relationships to the broader economy; the privatization of the Clinton and Bush years especially opened up new opportunities for capital accumulation in the provision of goods and services previously a part of the internal military production processes or a part of the production processes in other firms or state institutions.[61] For example, there was a massive proliferation of veteran services provided by charitable organizations, and significantly by religious organizations, that accompanied not only the military welfare privatizations but the general privatization of social welfare in the United States from the 1980s onward. Childcare options include on-base childcare, and subsidies for off-base childcare, but also partnerships with private babysitting platforms like "Care.com", operating through 'independent contractor' labour misclassification practices popularized by companies like food-delivery and ride-sharing apps: "Care.com does not employ any caregiver and is not responsible for the conduct of any user of our site."[62] But however one alters the intensity of inputs in military production processes (inputs of labour, commodities, services from private firms versus "in-house" paid or unpaid labour), it does not alter the structural character of the overall institution and its complex of capitalist social reproductive processes.[63]

4.1.1.1.1 Kitchen Police

Kitchen Police (KP) is U.S. military slang for kitchen or mess duties assigned to junior personnel. These can include cleaning dishes, food preparation, clearing tables, and more: domestic labour in the military/household. One of the major areas for grievances for soldiers in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the U.S. and European armies concerned living/working conditions. In the case of

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[60] Jennifer Mittelstadt, *The Rise of the Military Welfare State* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 191.

[61] For the political implications of this see: 'Caring for Militarism' in Abu El-Haj, *Combat Trauma*.

[62] Care.com, https://www.care.com/.

[63] Changes in these inputs and intensity could be important in concrete circumstances, however, but that exceeds the focus of this chapter.

the U.S. military in the post-war period, conditions were dire on bases within the U.S. as well as on foreign bases:

> soldiers lived in casernes [a military barracks in a garrison town] taken over from the Germans at the end of the war. Some dated back to the nineteenth century, and most were marred by peeling paint, falling plaster, leaking plumbing, and faulty wiring. [...] A soldier living in Merrell Barracks, Nuremberg, Germany, said of his living conditions, "If we repaired them 100 percent they would only be half as good as they were when Hitler's troops lived in them." He added that the local zoo was in better condition than troops barracks in Germany.[64]

In addition to the maintenance and health and safety issues, "lifestyle" issues – the dismissive term for what amounts to the regular development of cultural norms and expectations over time – were significant as well. Barracks in the U.S., often built in the World War II era, were typical residences for unmarried, low-ranking soldiers, consisting of platoon bays that slept up to forty men in two rows of ten bunk beds in a large open room; NCOs might typically have semi-private or private rooms at the end of the bays. Each soldier would have a wall locker and a footlocker for personal belongings as well as their military clothing, equipment, and supplies.[65]

A major reform in this period was reorganizing the division of military labour by shifting tasks considered menial and not requiring specialized military training or skills, many of which were the tasks of domestic labour, from soldiers to civilian employees; in the jargon of the military, the "civilianization" of "non-soldier duties". Reorganization of this work was part of the massive reforms of the shift to an all-volunteer force. Increasing pay, rebuilding barracks, and reassigning certain tasks to civilians were a part of improving the living and working conditions of soldiers, instituted to staff the new all-volunteer force.[66] As stated in an official report on Project Volunteer

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[64] Griffith, "The U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force, 1968-1974," 88.

[65] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 88. Barracks have developed over time to resemble something more akin to college dormitories or hotels, with semi-private rooms maybe with a kitchenette and shared kitchen facilities and/or bathrooms. These vary between bases.

[66] On the challenges of staffing the all-volunteer force, see, for example: Sapolsky et al., *US Defense Politics*.; Arthur T. Coumbe, "Accessing Talent: Historical Context," (Strategic Studies Institute, February 2010).

Army (VOLAR), a series of experiments was conducted in 1971, sponsored by the U.S. Army's Special Assistant for the Modern Volunteer Army (SAMVA).[67]

These reforms were necessary, as General Westmoreland put it, "so that our helicopter mechanics are not cutting grass and our radar technicians are not washing dishes."[68] "Civilianization" of kitchen and other "menial" duties "that consumed soldier labor and detracted from training stood out as the single most important success" of the VOLAR experiments to increase "professionalism".[69] In the House debates on the 1973 defense appropriation bill where authorizing the further shift of "nonmilitary duties" to civilians (and the accompanying budget increase) was up for debate, John Rhodes of Arizona said self-referentially, "Certainly [such duties] did not hurt this former soldier when he was on active duty." Surprising in retrospect, members of Congress were willing to criticize exceptional benefits for soldiers during these debates.[70] Louis Wyman of New Hampshire said that "he saw no reason why 'housekeeping chores, as they are called, whether KP [Kitchen Police] or cleanup details, should be considered beneath the dignity of members of the Armed Forces.'"[71]

Complaints were often made, however, by soldiers on the grounds that KP was assigned arbitrarily as punishment for minor infractions and easily available for abuse of power. Andy Stapp, organizer of the American Serviceman's Union, who will be discussed in chapter five, said in his 1970 memoir: "Except for combat, however, KP is the worst duty a soldier can get. Anyone from

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[67] "The whole point of the Project VOLAR experiments was to see what effect innovations in training, professionalism, and life-style would have on combat arms soldiers in terms of their attitudes toward the Army and their willingness to stay in the service beyond one enlistment." Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 103–104.

[68] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 52.

[69] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 103.

[70] This will be discussed further in chapter 5. Mittelstadt quotes members of congress identifying taxpayer subsidies to military health care, suggested military families make co-payments, and contribute premiums, and suggested to suspend cost-of-living increases on pensions. Jennifer Mittelstadt, "'The Army Is a Service, Not a Job': Unionization, Employment, and the Meaning of Military Service in the Late-Twentieth Century United States," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 80 (2011): 32.

[71] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 168-69.

sergeant on up is exempt from KP, and that is one very good reason most GIs would like to make sergeant."[72] He describes the duties as follows:

> The day of a soldier on KP begins at 3:30 A.M. with a sergeant shining a light in his face. The soldier shivers into his uniform, staggers over to the mess hall and waits outside for an hour until the cooks arrive. Enlisted men have often been disciplined from breaking into the mess hall because they chose not to freeze on winter mornings while waiting for the cooks to show up. [...] The GI on KP works both shifts [5 A.M. to noon, and noon to 9 P.M.].[73]

In his report "The U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force, 1968- 1974," Robert K. Griffith says of the debate when it reached the Senate: "Some senators, such as William Proxmire of Wisconsin, complained about 'maid and butler service' for enlisted service members. 'Who does KP for the taxpayer?' he asked. They do it themselves, he answered, and argued passage would result in increased idleness in the ranks."[74] While Senator Proxmire did not, as far as we know, follow the Marxist Feminist debates of the 1970s, his concerns certainly speak to the features of military labour that bring into view the connection between unpaid domestic labour and waged labour.

Military work has historically involved, in part, the domestic labour that the working class must collectively carry out to reproduce themselves as a class. This essential part of getting the commodity "labour-power" to market is typically not compensated by the employer, though wages are essential if it is to meet the (culturally-set) standard of living. However, the communal, often cloistered, living of the military barracks or base does make it materially necessary to ensure that this reproduction can happen so that "real" soldiering (the fulfilment of the military labour process producing capacity for coercive force) can happen satisfactorily – helicopter mechanics and radar technicians *do* need sanitary dishes to eat from. However one divides it, *someone* needs to do the labour, and since it takes place on "company time" through the live-work character of bases, it is

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[72] Stapp, *Up Against the Brass*, 63.

[73] Stapp, *Up Against the Brass*, 63.

[74] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 169.

made the employer's concern that someone has to bear the cost in money and in labour.[75] In support of the shift, Senator Pastore rhetorically asked whether, hypothetically, the experiment to shift soldiers' tasks to civilians was cut short and rolled back, the cost would be borne by those civilian employees' (and politicians): "'They would go on welfare. Where's the savings there?' Pastore asked. 'It's a $74 billion bill,' he declared."[76] Civilianization has remained of use to the Department of Defense in times of under-staffing (not enough soldiers) and as cost-saving, not just for "non-military" tasks but for all manner of non-combat tasks and occupations: airplane, ship, and tank repair; research, medical care, communications and logistics; and operating and maintaining military bases (and other installations).[77]

A less politically costly part of the experiment was domestic labour reform in the army concerning barracks living space, traditionally communal and austere. At Fort Benning (Georgia), "The troops eagerly participated in barracks rehabilitation and quickly purchased items of furniture, decorations, and other items of a personal nature to individualize their new 12-by-16-foot rooms."[78] While at Fort Ord (California) "[t]rainees tried movable partitions to break platoon bays

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[75] Over time, more and more of the goods and services required for the reproduction of military labour-power are directly a part of the circulation of capital, which as wage-like money-pay to purchase commodities directly. In the U.S. case, base pay may be topped up with additional pay for food and housing unless those are available to be consumed directly at a mess or galley or on-base housing. There is interesting empirical economic research to be done on need and military compensation, but it is outside the scope of this dissertation.

[76] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 169.

[77] "The DoD civilian work force contributes directly to the readiness of the Armed Forces by providing direction, continuity, and control in freeing uniformed personnel to perform military-specific tasks." "The Department has an on-going process to evaluate the military essentiality of active duty positions to determine if civilians can perform the work and is committed to converting positions that can be performed by civilians more cost effectively and without degrading readiness or military force management. So far, the process has identified some 53,000 military positions as conversion candidates. Toward that end, The Services have begun converting 10,000 military positions to civilian in FY 2004 and have programmed an additional 10,000 conversions for FY 2005." U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Requirements Report, Fiscal Year 2005 (Washington, DC: Defense Manpower Data Center, 2004), 13.

Significantly, during the most recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, many civilian personnel were local to the theatres of operations: approximately 53,000, as reported in 2005."In FY 2005, the Defense Department has programmed approximately 709,367 full-time equivalent (FTE) civilians to accomplish its mission requirements, excluding civil functions. Approximately 53,000 of these civilians are foreign national personnel on DoD's direct payroll or foreign nationals hired indirectly through contractual arrangement with host nations overseas." Defense Manpower Requirements Report FY2005, 13.

[78] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 102.

up into smaller living spaces"; however, they apparently "quickly went back to the open forty-man arrangement. They found that during the hectic pace of basic training open bays proved easier to clean."[79] It is not clear whether the return was determined by the soldiers or their superiors, but the experiment in the cultural norm of private personal space was determined, in this period, to be a lower priority for the soldiers' labour process than for the efficiency or ease of cleaning duties. Since then, housing accommodation for U.S. soldiers has been reformed to resemble the housing norms of civilian life: private rooms, or shared with a roommate, with communal kitchens and bathrooms, like dormitories; or single-family homes.

Many such tasks under the umbrella of cleaning are parts of reproduction that are universally necessary, but in this case they are undertaken for inspection (such as the particular maintenance of uniforms or tidying of living quarters), or organized in a particular way as a part of military discipline. But a frequent theme of complaint about KP was as an opportunity for arbitrary punishment, needlessly uncomfortable labour processes, and time-wasteful "make-work". As Stapp described,

> [... A] GI washing dishes has his hands in water fifteen hours a day, he doesn't want the water kept too hot. The cooks, however, who are really kitchen foremen, keep the water boiling hot to make certain the grease comes off everything. At the end of a dishwasher's day his fingernails are like rose petals and his hands are torn to pieces because the soap has too much lye in it.
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> [...] Enlisted men sometimes get so frustrated on KP that they take it out on the food. I have seen two hundred pounds of potatoes dumped into the peeler and left there until they were the size of peas. I saw a soldier put his muddy boot into a vat of orange juice. Another time a group of GIs beat up a room full of bananas until they were nothing but pulp.[80]

Aside from the physical toll and the boredom of KP, the unfairness, arbitrariness, and purposelessness are apparent in Stapp's anecdotes. In general, for soldiers, it appears that KP-relief and the broader reforms of domestic labour in this period were more importantly a relief from authoritarian discipline rather than the fact of having to perform these kinds of tasks as such.

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[79] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 103.

[80] Stapp, *Up Against the Brass*, 63–64. Stapp was sentenced to 45 days hard labour in 1967.

At the same time, it is also possible that the long-standing authority exercised over basic daily reproduction in such a regimented way, as in the a military tradition is a way of dominating soldiers, drawing on gendered anxieties. The nation-state represents that constant assertion of domination over a population and the military is one apparatus thereof. As emphasized, many of these tasks of reproduction are necessary; historically in a (mostly) homosocial environment, they would have had to be performed by men regardless of broader social norms about the tasks' femininity.[81] But the extreme ritualized regulation of these tasks enforces subordination of low-ranking soldiers to their officers, reinforcing through feminized tasks the authority of their superiors, often also classed- or racialized, and, ultimately, the state.

4.2 Value in military-work

Value appears in the military as it does throughout capitalist society.[82] As I have emphasized in this chapter, the state and the family are not outside of capitalist social reproduction. Soldiers are not value-producers but value-realizers: their work is to transform commodities through military and/or domestic labour processes into consumable 'goods', rather than to produce commodities. This unproductivity (of value) has no necessary bearing on whether soldiers can be included in an understanding (or a political formation) of the working class. I will discuss the wage form and its relationship to soldiers, then, the concept of un/productivity, and finally how to define the working class capaciously without losing political and analytical importance.

Use-value characterises products of nearly infinite variety to correspond to the nearly infinite needs and desires of society, produced by concrete labour's diverse capabilities; when not socially validated by exchange, value – a category of mediation between production and exchange – is never realized.[83] Criticisms of value abound, in feminist, ecological, and many other currents of Marxism, as well as in other traditions. The meanings of value, intrinsic value and price-as-value,

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[81] In various military configurations, such as the civil war era US, wives of low-ranking soldiers would travel with them and pick-up domestic work. See: Greene, *Wages of Empire*, 43.

[82] References to 'value' here will *not* be in a normative sense, unless otherwise indicated.

[83] Smith, *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism*, 81.

and value in Marx's sense, are often conflated or unspecified. We could also see this as a conflation or principled refusal of use- and exchange-value categories. I introduce this discussion here to emphasize that the conflation that critics perform is often ironically the result of a politics critical of the conflation in capitalist society of intrinsic and commodity value. For example, one might argue critically that intrinsically valuable work of childcare performed wagelessly by parents is rendered valueless because our society has conflated the commodity-value with intrinsic value, therefore ideologically de-valuing what should be recognized as valuable work. But I want to emphasize and draw out that the process of conflation in society is not a problem of misconceptualization, it is inherent to capital, and therefore cannot be solved through language. The substance of capital is value and that is the fundamental problem, for which Marxists argue for the abolition of the value form, not a broadening of its applicability.[84]

4.2.1 Wages and service labour

Wage labour is a novel historical form crucial to Marx's contribution to the critique of capitalism.[85] Rather than its colloquial, contemporary definition as payment of money in exchange for labour, a wage in its use by Marx we can understand as the capitalist form of payment where it *appears* as if the total day worked is paid, in contrast with 'unfree' labour: the specifically capitalist formation as a payment to a worker whose labour-power produces a commodity with use- and exchange-value. With 'unfree' labour, there (typically) is no 'freely' contracted wage-relation to disguise that only a part of the worker's labour is performed for the worker's own reproduction. The real life experience of concrete labour-processes mystifies the strangeness of the form, Vogel writes.[86] In capitalist production this unpaid portion, where the worker is producing solely for the

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[84] Best, "Wages for Housework Redux."

[85] While the absence of payment was at the centre of some feminist critique in the 20th century, the language of these demands has been misappropriated and misdirected away from the revolutionary horizons of abolishing capitalism and its imperatives, and into narratives that reinforce gender-essentialism and functionalist explanations of oppression that divert us from the avenues of struggle. Given prevailing discourses that reify the wage as a measure of value while at the same time disavowing it, it is worth looking back at the wage form and the wage form specifically in Marx.

[86] "First, in a feudal society in which serfs pay rent in kind, bringing the lord a share of the product, necessary labour and surplus-labour interpenetrate as labour processes. In the case of labour-rent, by contrast, in which serfs work the lord's field independently from their own plot, a clear spatial and temporal demarcation divides surplus-labour from necessary labour." Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 150.

boss, is obscured by the wage form, making it appear as though all the day's necessary labour is paid for by the wage.[87] In practice, a portion of that day's labour may be expended on achieving the reproduction of other members of the exploited class.[88]

In *Grundrisse*, Marx names soldiers specifically to mark by contrast the wage's novel historical form: the soldier's pay is *unlike* the free-worker's wage (or the unfree worker's non-pay) and instead can be understood as money-pay for a 'service', a category he describes as encompassing all kinds of personal services exchanged for revenues, from household servants to civil servants and physicians.[89] The category of service here is a description of social relation, not a normative description akin to 'care work' or to the contemporary 'service economy' that refers to low-wage retail, hospitality, and health sector work involving 'customer-service'. Marx references soldiers to emphasize the novelty of the historic emergence of capitalist *productive* labour.[90]

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[87] Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 148. Marx 1981, 680. "Necessary labour is the portion of the day's work in which the producer achieves his own reproduction. The remaining portion of the day's work is surplus-labour appropriated by the exploiting class."

[88] Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 148. This could mean directly performing tasks of domestic labour, such as feeding a child, or it could mean more time spent in waged work to acquire money that in capitalist society mediates access to most necessary goods and services for daily reproduction and life that meets cultural standards. The concept necessary labour covers "all labour performed in the course of the maintenance and renewal of both direct producers and members of the subordinate class not currently working as direct producers." "Together they represent an indispensable condition for the reproduction of labour-power and therefore for overall social reproduction." Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 149.

[89] Marx, "The Grundrisse," 258. This is echoed in the 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production', appended to Capital (Marx, *Capital*, 1041-43). U.S. labor historian William P. Jones argues that the concept of civil service in the U.S. in the Progressive era deliberately invoked the concept of domestic servants with the idea of "municipal housekeeping", placing the story in the broader histories of first-wave feminism, white supremacy, and U.S. imperialism. William P. Jones, "The Essential Worker: A History from the Progressive Era to COVID-19," *Labor* 20, no. 4 (2023): 6–23.

[90] Additionally, in an Appendix of *Capital* (Marx, *Capital*, 1042), he writes, "Now the fact that with the growth of capitalist production all services become transformed into wage-labour, and those who perform them into wage-labourers, means that they tend increasingly to be confused with the productive worker, just because they share this characteristic with him. This confusion is all the more tempting because it arises from capitalist production and is typical of it. On the other hand, it also creates an opening for its apologists to convert the productive worker, simply because he is a wage-labourer, into a worker who only exchanges his services (i.e. his labour as a use-value) for money. This makes it easy for them to gloss over the specific nature of this ' productive worker ' and of capitalist production - as the production of surplus-value, as the self-valorization of capital in which living labour is no more than the agency it has embodied in itself. *A soldier is a wage-labourer, a mercenary, but this does not make a productive worker of him*."

However, we should not therefore take this to mean that today all service labour, or unproductive labour paid by revenues rather than capital, is unbound from the wage relation and value form. My tentative proposal is that in the process of generalized wage dependency, the logic of the wage ends up extending[91] even to strictly unproductive labour processes in many cases. 'Unproductivity' captures most of what is implied in the 'services' distinction Marx makes (insofar as they are in fact carried out in unproductive labour processes), and so that description 'unproductive' largely suffices to identity the value-relation that 'services' once did. Importantly for understanding soldiers in this chapter, is that this revenue-consuming unproductive labour is relevant to both 'private' and 'public' spheres of consumption: unproductive labour can be paid or unpaid, and can take place in a state production process as much as a household production process, which in fact overlap in the case of much military labour. Unlike labour-power whose purpose is producing a commodity (an object or service) that can be sold for the capitalist's *profit*, the purpose of service-labour is the buyer's direct consumption *of that labour-service*, rather than putting that labour-power to work to produce something to be sold that may be consumed. The same concrete labour activity could be unproductive, if paid by revenues for the consumption of the buyer, or productive if paid for in the setting of a capitalist enterprise for which the labour-power commodity is set to work producing an exchangeable commodity.[92] By endeavoring to determine that soldiers are unproductive, I aim to describe their relation to value and thereby capitalist class relations. As

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[91] We might even say it colonizes this relation. More theorizing and empirical work would be needed to explore this, but I am supposing that this process of colonization is not *necessary*; I see this as related to the work arguing that "domestic labour does not necessarily provide a subsidy to the capitalist class" or "that cost minimisation from the perspective of the capitalist class can't necessarily explain existing or idealised family-household configurations and/or the social assignment of domestic labour in capitalism to women." Munro, "Capitalist Form of Household Production," 262.

[92] We are not employed nor paid for the work of self-service check out, but the Loblaws corporation profits from it, as they no longer have to pay for that activity. A management strategy with a long history now. See, Glazer: "...the unpaid involuntary domestic labor of women has been pulled into the labor process in capitalist organizations in the drive to increase profit by reducing the wage bill while at the same time encouraging consumerism. An historical case is presented of retailing where the 'self-service' organization of commercial capitalism (and aspects of the service sector) resulted in both a new division of labor and in occupational change. Men sales clerks were displaced gradually by women who in turn had their work deskilled by the growth of the cashier occupation. Today, women as unpaid consumers and as paid cashiers do much of the work in buying and selling so-called white consumer durables and foods." Nona Y. Glazer, "Servants to Capital: Unpaid Domestic Labor and Paid Work," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 16, no. 1 (1984): 61–87.

Braverman writes, "the discussion is in reality an analysis of the relations of production and, ultimately, the class structure of society, rather than of the utility of particular varieties of labor."[93]

Soldiers are unlike value-productive workers for several reasons. As soldiers, they do not produce surplus value.[94] Their labour does not produce commodities with which firms realize value; their labour is not exchanged against capital.[95] Their pay (and any benefits) come from revenues of the state rather than from capital.[96] Productive labour under capitalism, as defined by Marx, is labour that produces in goods or services commodity value and thus surplus value for capital. Braverman's discussion of revenue-consuming services of unproductive labour in the next section should illuminate the necessity of historically situating the political implications of unproductive or productive employees. This approach allows for an understanding of soldiers' relation to value that goes beyond the (still important) determination of whether their work is productive or unproductive for value, by exploring the capitalist forms of wage, commodity, and more effect the military forms of capitalist social relations.

The productive/unproductive distinction remains useful despite critiques, which are marginal in Marxist scholarship but more pervasive in other discourses (such as political theory and feminist scholarship) and for whom "the categorization of unwaged social reproduction as 'unproductive' invisibilizes its role in accumulation and undermines the radical comportment of the critique," Best writes.[97] For the Marxist Feminist scholarship I draw from, they accept the enduring relevance of the distinction but reject that the only production in capitalist society is value-productive, and so while the language is not beautiful, we can say there exists *un*productive (of value) *production* in

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[93] Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (Monthly Review Press, 1998), 284–85.

[94] "The value of the commodity labour-power is determined *only* by the value of the *commodities* that comprise the worker's means of subsistence. … This is because these commodities–commodities that working class households are required to incessantly purchase as a result of the violent separation of workers from their means of subsistence–must be purchased as commodities with money from wages." Munro, "Capitalist Form of Household Production," 263.

[95] Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 285.

[96] This applies to state employees generally – a product of the modern, capitalist state.

[97] Best, "Wages for Housework Redux."

the capitalist society. For this scholarship, as with SRT and related offshoots, the point of contrast (and political object implicit in many of these theoretical arguments) is with older Marxist assessments of unpaid domestic labour as processes of consumption exclusively, contrasted to production.[98] As outlined above in discussing the household production process, commodities purchased with a wage to fill needs of hunger, cleanliness, pleasure, and comfort, rarely arrive to the household ready to be consumed. They typically require combination with domestic labour in additional processes of *unproductive* (of value) production to be useful to the household's production of labour-power: food requires shopping, transporting, cleaning, cooking, and so on, and even machine-innovations like the washing machine and vacuum cleaner regrettably do not autonomously perform their cleaning function.

The categorical distinction between productive and unproductive labor against the impulse to impose new and better (more human, more feminist, more ethical) laws of value onto society is a significant one: "only a post-capitalist mode of production—were it to take the form of some new socialism or some new barbarism—could turn "life itself" into the substance of value," Best reminds us.[99] Braverman writes, the distinction "represents a decisive point in the analysis of capitalism, and shows us once more how social forms dominate and transform the significance of material things and processes."[100] That "labor mobilized by capital in the private production of goods and services is the *singular source of new value in its capitalist form*"[101] is part of Marx's great contribution. As society's reproduction is "organized around the free market exchange of unplanned, privately-produced goods and services",

> the social substance of value necessarily emerges as socialized (i.e., abstract) labor [...] This accidental development of history precipitates a socialized form of value (*value becomes the form sociality itself*) whose substance and mode of generation are

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[98] Weinbaum and Bridges, "Other Side of the Paycheck," 88–103.

[99] Best, "Wages for Housework Redux," 900.

[100] Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 285.

[101] Best, "Wages for Housework Redux," 900. Emphasis mine.

> *singular and unalterable* within a capitalist system, *so long as that system remains dominant*.[102]

Rather than a technicality, understanding the value form is what allows us precisely to identify and analyze how capital "mediates various contemporary forms of oppression"[103] and "group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."[104]

Let us take an example from Braverman where he distinguishes between capital's uses for productive and unproductive labour. Historically, unproductive labour *declined* as a share outside of capitalist production (subsistence agriculture, most notably) but *increased* within capitalist production.[105] Realization and appropriation of surplus value involves enormous masses of labour, revenue-consuming services, and bureaucratic or management work, that is itself unproductive but is still very much necessary to the capitalist as firms (and later the state) grew in unprecedented complexity and size.[106] This distinction of unproductivity within capitalism grows lost even on management: "the measuring of the productivity of labor *has come to be applied to labor of all sorts*, even labor which has no productivity."[107] We see this demand for efficiency (in certain professions, self-measured!) in all forms of paid work, productive (or "waged") and otherwise – and in this sense we can imagine how the wage form comes to dominate paid work outside of direct production.

From Braverman's analysis of the historical development of the employment of unproductive and productive labour inside the capitalist firm, we arrive at a counterintuitive point of unity. In the early capitalist enterprise, there were few unproductive employees and unlike the productive

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[102] Best, "Wages for Housework Redux," 900.

[103] Best, "Wages for Housework Redux," 901.

[104] Ruth Wilson Gilmore's popular definition of racism: "the state-sanctioned and/or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death." Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 247.

[105] Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 286-87.

[106] Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 287.

[107] Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 287. Emphasis added.

worker, their status as an employee was *not* a misfortune.[108] They served in accountancy and other management functions that had special privileges associated with them and were seen by the capitalist as associates.[109] But in the twentieth century, Braverman's object of study, the segment of unproductive employees grew, and their work also degraded to the point that only a few management 'heads' shared that status of 'associate' of the capitalist. The degradation process is one of either crisis or routine search for value, even among the degradation of work of unproductive workers. Productive labour is degraded through deskilling (discussed further in chapter five), losing their individual "characteristics as producer of a finished commodity which made him or her a productive worker, and retains those characteristics only *in the mass*," while the a mass of unproductive labor "has been created which shares in the subjugation and oppression that characterizes the lives of the productive workers."[110] There therefore emerges from the technical division of labour in capitalist enterprise, the same (material) degradation, experienced differently, such that the unproductive and productive masses share in their exploitation. We arrive united in exploitation, not recognition. There is therefore no reason for military work, despite its unproductive character, to nevertheless be subject to the forces that degrade or otherwise shape productive work.[111]

The tasks of soldiers' work can be and are reorganized by their employer or the imperatives of capital: soldiers may be tasked with kitchen duty and perform the work of cooking and cleaning, or it may be reorganized to civilian employees or outsourced to private-sector contractors. Medical care may be done by soldiers themselves, by medical units, by civilian employees, by private contractors, or not covered at all depending on the service and expected to be fulfilled in the home.

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[108] Marx, *Capital*, 477.

[109] The 'fortune' of the small segment of early management-adjacent workers Braverman describes, may correspond to other segments of the working class today typically associated with the nebulously-defined 'middle class'. These terms however are loaded with ideological baggage that can obscure the real processes of labour degradation among once-privileged groups. For example, professions that require high skill and are well-compensated, but once many people acquire those skills, employers can exercise more control and lower compensation, such as the early 2000's 'learn-to-code' boom.

[110] Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 289.

[111] Cultural status, however, has been shored up for soldiers in countries like the United States (discussed more in chapter 5).

Combat or policing work may be shifted from one service to another, 'automated' or mechanized[112], outsourced to military contractors, or to allied governments. The tasks that make up a job can and are sliced up to improve productivity, lower costs, or increase control all the time. Generally, these tasks that are subjected to that kind of attention by employers, and partly how I would evaluate whether something is work. In addition, the tasks that are necessary to the worker - to survive and the replenish the labour-power commodity the must sell continuously - but are not incorporated into the working day may still be the object of the employer's and/or capital's concern and control. For example, childcare may be established for soldiers' children that is organized in-house; it could be outsourced to a private contractor; or it could be also made more expensive or restrictive and therefore offloaded to the unpaid family members.[113]

Necessary labour captures a totality of capitalist social reproduction that can describe how, through class struggle, exploiting and exploited shift concrete tasks into different (connected) sectors of re/production; this allows us as analysts to 'follow' them in a more holistic vision that captures sites of conflict, power, and unity. In this way burdens are shifted or alleviated; jobs are eliminated; profits rise; states reallocate money; and crises are 'handled'. Glazer's classic study of "work transfer", whereby capital and the state shift certain health care tasks from paid workers to unpaid family members, is an excellent example of this.[114] Shifts can in practice be motivated rhetorically by claims about the naturalness of family-provided care, but there is no true 'rightful' place for

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[112] The rise of drones (remotely piloted vehicles) is the most famous example. It is not possible to open up the conversation to technological developments within the scope of this dissertation. This is a very important question or dynamic that I have considered and has shaped my thinking. See, for example: Andrea Asoni, et al., "A Mercenary Army of the Poor? Technological Change and the Demographic Composition of the Post-9/11 U.S. Military," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 45, no. 139 (2020): 1–47.; Jon R. Lindsay, *Information Technology and Military Power* (Cornell University Press, 2020).; Jason Resnikoff, *Labor's End: How the Promise of Automation Degraded Work* (University of Illinois Press, 2021).; "The Technology Trap: Capital, Labor, and Power in the Age of Automation," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 20, no. 2 (2023): 156–58.; Paul Stasi, "The Grundrisse as Method: Surplus Value, Surplus Labor and Freedom from Work," *Science & Society* 83, no. 4 (2019): 522–35.

[113] "The Defense Department oversees over 800 Child Development Centers (CDCs) on military installation worldwide." Amy Bushatz, "Military Child Care," Military.com, October 31, 2017.

[114] Nona Y. Glazer, "The Home as Workshop: Women as Amateur Nurses and Medical Care Providers," *Gender & Society* 4, no. 4 (December 1990): 479–99.; *Women's Paid and Unpaid Labor: The Work Transfer in Health Care and Retailing* (Temple University Press, 1993).

these tasks; they are moved as a solution for capital's interests, costs, and labour discipline, and are done so not linearly but in the course of crisis and struggle.

The domestic component of necessary labour can be done in a private family household, but it can also be done in a prison, a school, a military barracks, or a ship. The other component of necessary labour is the social component, which is the means by which commodities are purchased and are typically associated with the wage. The wage *appears* to compensate both necessary labour and surplus labour. In wage-labour, the wage is paid for the amount of necessary labour required for the worker to reproduce their labour-power; the rest of the working day the capitalist gets for free, surplus labour, although the wage appears to cover the entire day's work. Vogel shows how the wage for necessary labour does not only include the cost of commodities but also that first domestic component that is required to make use of those commodities in the household production processes.

This theoretical grounding helps us recognize how capital and the state shift work and money between the necessary labour components (deliberately or not). Glazer makes the argument forcefully in her book on self-service, a type of decommodification that forces households to reabsorb costs of social reproduction that had been shifted to capital and the state after conflict and struggle.[115] This is one concrete way that capital can substitute unpaid labour for paid labour. Capital and the state eliminate services in a struggle for markets and profits and over social entitlements. This is what labour-standpoint misses, the concrete moves of capital and the state.[116] In studying people in 'unsympathetic' jobs, like soldiers, we can eschew that temptation to read such struggles moralistically, and try to analyse instead why capital and the state favored, for example, reduced force sizes and higher technology investment after the Cold War.

One major form of degradation is technological substitution or automation. For example, cultural artifacts like songs and poems of the First World War capture the sense of militaries consuming

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[115] For example, under neoliberal austerity, payroll expenditure is reduced by having insufficient staffing levels of the lowest-skill-graded nursing-adjacent staff, offloading the necessary tasks of care and monitoring from paid employees to unpaid family members (or privately-hired home care workers); however this necessary work is carried out and to what standard of quality, it is no longer on the hospital's responsibility. Glazer 1990.

[116] Glazer, "Home as Workshop," 34–36.

working-class boys as mere cannon fodder. Generations later, the poverty draft became a popular descriptor for the volunteer army in the US when mandatory service was ended in 1973. The term captured the idea that the enlisted ranks of the military were made up of young people with limited economic opportunities, where poverty structurally drafted them into a nominally voluntary service. Security studies literature, and military recruiters, reject the term "poverty draft", arguing that "the poor" are not good recruiting material because they lack the necessary education, and today's military is more demanding mentally than merely equivalent to civilian general labour. There is a truth to that: the U.S. military over the course of the Cold War, particularly after Vietnam, shifted focus to investments in high-technology, coinciding with the general shift in the economy away from trades and manufacturing toward "the service sector" and venture-capital-backed high-tech equipment and the forms of war corresponding to that: that is, the 'Revolution in Military Affairs', involving an emphasis on new computer technologies, surveillance and 'policing' missions, precision-targeting, etc. This period corresponds to the funnelling of the poor into prisons rather than the armed forces;[117] as well as the rise of global military contracting.[118]

The poverty draft remains valid as a critique of capitalist society as a whole, where the structural compulsion to reproduce oneself via the wage is not confined to the lowest segments of the working classes, nor to military recruitment.[119] Furthermore, it depends on sociological definitions of 'the working class' defined by the relative education, family income levels, and other poor proxy indicators, rather than class as defined by the value form and contradictory social relations.[120] The RMA period of the late- and post-Cold War, has made military work more attractive in many respects, through connections to the ascendant service-sector and has become a

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[117] "Unlike prior research finding that military service provided "bridging careers" for racial minorities, black men are no longer more likely to join the military than whites. Instead, blacks now face a much higher risk of incarceration." JooHee Han, "Who Goes to College, Military, Prison, or Long-Term Unemployment? Racialized School-to-Labor Market Transitions Among American Men," *Population Research and Policy Review* 37, no. 4 (August 2018): 615–40.

[118] Yoko Kanemasu and Gyozo Molnar, "Private Military and Security Labour Migration: The Case of Fiji," *International Migration* 55, no. 4 (2017): 154–70.

[119] It is also a point of unity perhaps for Marxist and left-liberals, as Marxists critique the compulsion to labour and left-liberals critique the compulsion to particular labours.

[120] Gerstenberger, *Impersonal Power*.

stepping-stone into directly productive private-sector settings in which to perform similar work; Israel is a stand-out example of this.[121] But also, its attractiveness at an individual level occurs in the context of industrial decline and persistent unemployment.[122] So while the connotations of cannon fodder and poverty draft no longer comport with military experience across the board, the underlying class structure of a working and exploiting class recruitment pool remain intact, even as a 'top' segment thereof is elevated and distinguished from others. As Nealon writes, "Capital accumulation has always been in continual flux, down to this day, putting workers who labor without managerial care for their health against those whose health is monitored and managed, producing a stratified working class according to the demands, not of machinery, but of the intercapitalist competition that compels the use of machinery in the first place."[123] The particular dynamics, the relative compensation or skill associated with different lines of work have changed along with broader developments in world capitalism. The productive/unproductive distinction and the historical context of labour degradation and deskilling is an important analytic tool to understand the context of these developments.

4.2.2 Generalized wage dependency and primitive accumulation

Despite the clarity that soldiers are not productive workers, in the sense of valorizing capital, there are reasons they as individuals have been and may be considered part of the working class.[124] Workers do not own the means of production, and so soldiers drawn from civilian classes (proletarians, peasants, etc.) must sell their labour-power to reproduce themselves; these criteria

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[121] Ori Swed and John Sibley Butler, "Military Capital in the Israeli Hi-Tech Industry," *Armed Forces & Society* 41, no. 1 (2015): 123–41.

[122] John Komlos, "Unemployment in the High-Pressure Capitalism of the 21st Century: Introduction," *Forum for Social Economics* 52, no. 4 (July 12, 2023): 323–33.

[123] Christopher Nealon in Christopher Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of the World System*, ed. Max Fox (Duke University Press, 2020), 8.

[124] As discussed in the preceding section, I find Braverman's analysis the unity-in-degradation of productive and unproductive workers more politically useful than a sociological search for a revolutionary subject. This search tends toward a repetition of the Orthodox Marxist productivism that the work I'm most interested in methodologically – Open Marxism, value-informed Marxist Feminisms – rejects. In this, and many ways, my thinking has evolved in the course of writing this dissertation. If I began this dissertation anew today, I may not feel so compelled to stake out a claim on soldiers' class status or, at least, I would be guided by a different set of reasons, ones which I've tried to emphasise through my revisions, than an Orthodox theory of revolution.

indicate subjection to historical *expropriation* from the means of production, including land, and subsequent wage dependency. This process is often referred to as primitive or original accumulation. Primitive accumulation includes both the appropriation by capital or nascent-capital of land or resources previously outside the sphere of capitalist property relations as well as the separation of people from their pre-capitalist relations to that land or resources.[125] The historic process of expropriation or primitive accumulation rendered the vast majority of the world's population "doubly free" in a commodity-based economy:

> For the transformation of money into capital, therefore, the owner of money must find the free worker available on the commodity-market; and this worker must be free in the double sense that as a free individual he can *dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity*, and that, on the other hand, he has *no other commodity* for sale.[126]

With labour-power their only commodity to exchange in a world (not only an economy) defined by the value form and exchange of commodities, generalized wage dependency developed and the sale of that labour-power and its performance took on great significance.

Generalized wage dependency is a historical development in capitalism where this concept of the wage becomes a generalized means by which the expropriated or working classes must reproduce themselves. Members of the working class are subjected to a *generalized* dependence on the wage, regardless of whether they are themselves employed as waged value-producers. This need for a wage, literally money, may be satisfied in the form of the wage in this strict sense but also by other forms of pay (state welfare payments, pensions, etc.).[127] For an individual working-class household, a wage-equivalent is almost always one necessary input for its reproduction, along with unpaid domestic labour, and state infrastructure as described above.[128]

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[125] This is not to elide *non*-capitalist property relations, relationships of ownership conceived otherwise, or relations akin to sovereignty.

[126] Marx, *Capital*, 272. Emphasis mine.

[127] On the welfare components of the U.S. military see: Jessica L. Adler, "Mediating the Economic Impacts of Service: Race and Veterans' Welfare after the War in Vietnam," in *The Military and the Market* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 150–68.; Abu El-Haj, *Combat Trauma*.; Mittelstadt, *Rise of the Military Welfare State*.

[128] Munro, "'Social Reproduction Theory," Social Reproduction, and Household Production," 453.

Since "for the seller of labor power access to the means of subsistence is contingent upon her ability to achieve a labor contract," Bonefeld writes, "*she belongs to the capitalist before she trades her labor power for a wage*".[129] Seeing the wage as the precondition of the worker, the Poulantzian understanding, therefore has it backwards. This value-form-critical understanding sees the worker's alienation from the means of production, their expropriation, and their belonging to a class and exploitable class, as a condition of the compulsion to seek a wage, and this as an ongoing feature and imperative of capitalism.[130] Our previous discussion of the wage form, is clarified further, showing how capitalist forms of value, wage, and commodity, precedes any labour process, productive or unproductive. While it is correct, for instance, that the unpaid, often racialized or feminized 'unproductive' worker *does* belong to the working class in my account, it is not because they 'labour', or because their labour is virtuous or useful, but because they are subject to this specific capitalist social relation of generalized wage dependency and therefore exploitability that emerges from the historical process of expropriation. I argue that the same holds true for the working-class soldier.

Though perhaps unexpected for a theorization of military labour, this understanding of class is important to understanding the kind of labour the state consumes. That is to say the soldier's total role, their productive role in working-class household production processes, and their role in state production processes, which are connected to capital's circulation, consumption, and production in ways similar to the private household. If value and the wage form create the worker, the working class, and the labour-process, we can see how the critique of value leads to critique of the (abstract) labour as the other side of the same coin of specific capitalist forms of wealth and work.[131] This connection helps me draw the distinction of work as we know it, soldiering included, being something to be done away with along with capitalism, rather than 'work' and 'worker' as a category of anti-capitalist normative recognition. The end product of the military labour processes is meant to be political capacity of a particular violent and coercive kind, obscured by prevalent

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[129] Bonefeld, "On the State as Political Form of Society," 177–84. Emphasis mine.

[130] Bonefeld, "Primitive Accumulation and Capitalist Accumulation."

[131] Hence Elson's terminology "the value theory of labour". Elson, "Value Theory of Labour."

technological and weapons fetishism.[132] What does this mean for this type of politics that its labour, its conditions, its raison d'etre is a form of capitalist social relations? To critique the labour of political violence, is to posit its transitoriness, and the necessity of its abolition.

4.3 Conclusion

While we must of course understand the institutional context and concrete nature of their work and its political role in the capitalist world system, I propose that a fulsome materialist understanding requires this appreciation of the structure of capitalist re/production, in which work, including soldiering, takes place. This allows us to situate the specificities of recruitment, institutional occupations, retirement, and post-service life, as well as revolutionary or alternative subjectivities, in a class analysis and in relationship to value.

The aim of this chapter has been to describe what I see as the structural foundation for understanding the soldier in capitalist society, and the way we can identify *class* struggle as happening in and forming the state form, illuminated as a movement of contradiction in and through class.[133] Soldiers are subjected to generalized wage dependency, historical and ongoing primitive accumulation, requiring them to reproduce themselves by a combination of waged labour and unwaged domestic labour – the military is their means of acquiring a wage. This takes us some way further in demystifying the labour that makes up the state and military and their powers. This understanding of the relations that create class, is contrary to a sociological taxonomy, or a politicist identification of soldiers exclusively with the state. The working class, at an abstract and general level of capitalist social reproduction, is best understood therefore in terms of this historical appropriation and generalized wage dependency, and therefore indicates how in concrete historical variations, a politicized working class may include unproductive workers, such as soldiers, whose *un*productive (of value) *production* is nonetheless formed by the capitalist forms of value.

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[132] Weapons do nothing on their own. They require labour's skill and activity to do something with. On weapons fetishism see: Shafer, "Engels after Frankfurt."

[133] Bonefeld et al., "Introduction," xix.

Importantly, this definition constitutes class relations but not the historical form of struggles.[134] Class formation and political direction can never be determined in the abstract, outside of an historical encounter. Soldier's employment and labours, like all of ours, are temporary – "both real and abstract, here and elsewhere in the same constitutive moment," to borrow a phrase.[135]

The domestic labours both separate from the military production processes and integrated within, help illuminate 'life' and 'labour' as inextricable parts of a totality. Domination by capital's forms, including commodities, the wage, the state, exert themselves in the military labour processes of domestic labour as much as power-production for coercive force, and the domestic labour of 'home' life. In struggles over pay, benefits, control over the household production processes and their inputs (wages, benefits, commodities, infrastructure), the state asserts sovereignty over labour and life. Resentment and resistance by soldiers is likewise an assertion over the sovereignty over life and labour that they expend in their work and their own reproduction. Labour and resistance are what we turn to next.

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[134] Clarke, "Global Accumulation of Capital," 152.

[135] De'Ath, "Hidden Abodes and Inner Bonds," 237.

Chapter 5
The Union Question

No more deluded by reaction
On tyrants only we'll make war
The soldiers too will take strike action
They'll break ranks and fight no more

And if those cannibals keep trying
To sacrifice us to their pride
They soon shall hear the bullets flying
We'll shoot the generals on our own side.

–'The International', 1871[1]

At a time when society is in a process of change, we cannot stop the increasing democratization at the barracks doors [...] The military cannot be an entirely separate society.[2]

–A Dutch soldier to the *New York Times*, 1977

Maybe Custer did lose, but it couldn't have been because he had long hair and a goatee, because the Indians he lost to had even longer hair.

–A U.S. G.I. to *Forward*, 1974[3]

5 Introduction

The socialist militia question of the 19th century inquired as to the soldier's position in the capitalist state and the role's potential for subversion, immortalized in the lyrics of the anthem *L'Internationale*, quoted above. Revolution was thought of in terms of taking state power necessarily by force. Such a task had to overcome state repression, which in many circumstances, particularly colonial ones, meant direct confrontation with a hostile enemy. But in other contexts,

[1] Eugène Pottier "The International", https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/sounds/lyrics/international.htm.

[2] Jonathan Kandell, "Europeans Taking Soldier Unions in Stride," The New York Times, December 19 1977.

[3] Unidentified U.S. G.I. quoted in "Forward Hair resistance Press Releases", *Forward*, G.I. newspaper, 16 September 1974, Berlin.

the prospect of armed revolution could also potentially require subverting and appropriating the labour of state violence – working-class soldiers – into its own ranks. As discussed in chapter three, the idea of the militia promised some kind of popular-power over the violence-power of the state. The question of the state's monopoly on violence was still a matter of active class struggle, including in military labour processes. In the West, politicizing it grew only more difficult in the 20th century.

The post-WWII union question returns us under new historical circumstances to similar questions, but in a very different historical conjuncture, both ideologically and materially.[4] Soldiers in the armies of advanced capitalist states questioned ideologies of military exceptionalism and entertained the prospect of their place in the labour movement. As I have claimed throughout this dissertation and presented in chapter four, *work* is done in militaries: by soldiers, other employees, and non-employees in familiar, typical forms of work such as construction but also atypical forms such as violence and sex work, whose association with the 'personal' or 'political' are conventionally separated ideologically from the 'economic'. All this work consists of tasks and outcomes that can be wasteful, violent, oppressive, and undesirable. Ultimately, this work expresses the divisions of class society.[5] Asking critical questions about labour can reveal important aspects of institutions, and I continue that endeavor here, to consider the logical extension of 20th century struggles for workplace democracy and industrial democracy in the military and their limits.

Military unionism is distinct from the militia question, which was focused directly on state power and popular citizenship's relation to state power, particularly, rights to arms and use of force, and the strategic question of revolutionary power. As chapter three showed, early Marxists and socialists grappled with soldiers in terms of their political power and their class formation, not as embodiments of a form of labour. Furthermore, the 19th century was an actively revolutionary period in the advanced capitalist countries, many of which had ruling classes still able to resist the demands to institute mass democracy; Engels thought at one point that the universal franchise and

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[4] Lebowitz, *Socialist Imperative*.

[5] Lenin, *State and Revolution*, 10–11.

universal conscription would be a likely pair, which with a free press and other civil rights would pave a path for workers' self-emancipation. The contradiction of proletarians versus the power of the capitalist state endures in this chapter, which jumps ahead to the second half of the 20th century when in many countries across the Western world, soldiers unionised or attempted to do so. Resistance to this enduring contradiction of capitalist society – the working-class labour of state power – was in the mid- to late-20th century channelled into the union form, as an ideal and a strategy, rather than into militia. Furthermore, it was channelled in this way in a decidedly non-revolutionary valence (in most cases).

To clarify this chapter's scope, it is worth stating that soldier activism with more radical or revolutionary politics did take place,[6] but my focus here is reform and protest efforts *within* the military as an institution that took on left-wing labour union ideas and forms.[7] By 'reform', I do not mean to imply a solely ideological designation; some efforts under discussion were connected to radical politics – *Bond Voor Dienstplichtigen* (BVD) (League of Conscripts) and American Servicemen's Union (ASU) – while others were apolitical – the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE). The union efforts I look at here however, were not underground, and when punishable or resulting in courts-martial, were disruptive in the sense of civil disobedience, strike actions, and other such forms, as opposed to sabotage or terroristic methods. Additionally, advanced capitalist left-wing politics in this period did also take armed forms in this period, many of which were particularly prominent (the Black Panther Party, the Red Army Faction, and the Irish Republican Army). But to my knowledge these were not significantly connected to military/soldier politics other than as oppositional, so while they share a history with the *insurgent*-revolutionary history of militia, they do not share the history of the militia as a rival

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[6] In discussing the ASU for example or the VVDM, there are individual unionists with revolutionary politics. The range and extent of U.S. soldier activism, disobedience, and other political actions are beyond the scope of this chapter. See: Ron Carver et al., eds. *Waging Peace in Vietnam: U.S. Soldiers and Veterans Who Opposed the War* (New Village Press, 2019).

[7] Right wing formations seem more typical these days and have attracted more scholarship accordingly. For one study of present-day right-wing military and police unions: Raquel Rego and Susana Durão, "The Representative Organizations of the Security Forces in Brazil and Portugal as Transmission Belts of the Far-Right Parties," *Capital & Class* 0, no. 0 (2025). For an introduction to some right-wing (as well as left-wing and otherwise) cases, see: Mike Gonzalez and Houman Barekat, eds., *Arms and the People: Popular Movements and the Military from the Paris Commune to the Arab Spring* (Pluto Press, 2013).

military form or mode of left-wing organizing among soldiers themselves, which is the focus of this project.

This chapter looks at military unions to explore a brief period of time of recognition of the labour of the soldier and their relationship to their respective states-cum-workplaces as well as a fleeting moment of political opportunity. While not possible to consider the U.S. and Dutch experiences in-depth, the points of comparison are important to contradict the claims made within national debates about militaries *per se*; military exceptionalism against union rights in the U.S. on the basis of the concept of military, defense, or national security *as such* is contradicted by the other countries where much greater rights were extended to or won by soldiers.[8] The very word *union*, for the military leadership and governments of many countries, including the U.S., sounded like the lyrics of 'The International'.

As with the militia question in chapter three, my aim here is not to advocate for one or another military-labour regime. Rather, I aim to explore a particular historical moment and make some claims: first, soldiers experienced issues of work and living conditions at their workplaces; second, that these are *class* struggles, at least in part. This was a particular moment in history when the class struggle could be expressed in the form of labour-struggle in the military. While this moment has passed for many reasons both material and ideological, this contingent episode of the political contradictions of working-class soldiers and their labour in the capitalist-imperialist core reveals an enduring political problem: one of the many barriers to international working-class solidarity necessary not just for peace but for self-emancipation from capitalist social relations.

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[8] The Netherlands is the example I use, but Sweden and Denmark could also have been interesting examples of contrast. "In Denmark trade unions are seen as important democratic institutions and are fully accepted in the armed forces. There are three military trade unions[…] They even have the right to strike – although not in uniform. As Danish soldiers have become more extensively deployed on missions abroad, so the unions have expanded their influence to include operational matters. Although there are limitations, a Cooperation Agreement grants unions the right to take up any aspect of mutual interest. Included in the scope of negotiations are matters related to deployment, family support and even equipment." Heinecken, *Military unionism in the post Cold War era*, 12. Cortright and Watts (*Left Face*, 128–140) characterize the Scandinavian examples as company unions in contrast to the social-movement hybrid in the Netherlands. A company union is a union controlled by the employer, not independently by the employees or their delegates.

Having established in the previous chapter a general and abstract basis for understanding the class position of soldiers and their potential for inclusion in a working class politics, in this chapter I turn to the specificity of the military labour process as a place where struggle over the role of the working-class soldier in the capitalist state has taken place. I will begin with the question of why would soldiers want to unionize, by outlining some of the grievances of soldiers in the 1960s-1970s, describing the conditions of their work, and elaborating a critique of the labour described. I will discuss one form of resistance to these problems: organized labour. I will look at the Netherlands as the preeminent example of soldier union success and as a point of contrast to the cases of unionization in the U.S. Military. which I will discuss in more detail. I will then discuss the repression and reform that greeted the soldiers' union movement, particularly how reform was used as a mode of repression. I will conclude with a discussion of the aftermath of this period, in particular, the transition to volunteer armies.

5.1 Class conflict and grievances in the military workplace

"Soldiers join the Army to soldier," said Lt. Gen. George Forsythe to the *Army Times*.[9] However, as emphasized in the previous chapter, soldiers have always engaged in a wide range of other labour activities, whether for daily reproduction (feeding oneself and others, cleaning barracks- or camp-households), infrastructural production and maintenance, and medicine and engineering. The boundaries therefore between 'soldiering' and many other forms of work are not natural or even always superficially apparent other than by whom they are undertaken, soldier or civilian. Even non-combat activities with civilian equivalents in their concrete form, such as engineering or daily reproduction, are nevertheless in the *military* setting directed toward the production of coercive force for the reproduction of the institution and the achievement of political aims. These are all the actions of *political* objectives designed by *others*: to control a place, resources, or people for the enrichment, advantage, or benefit (financially or politically) of another – for example, preparing the mass of the institutions for the possibility of a war, imagined to be a particular state,

[9] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 76. Hiring civilians to do "non-soldier duties" was a major reform of the early 1970s. "Freeing soldiers from KP, post clean-up details and grass cutting would give them back to the sergeants, he said. The result would be more training. Furthermore, he added, units would be able to train at full strength. His program intended to "free the soldier of non-soldier duties."

type of adversary (great power, "near-peer competitor", non-state actors, etc.), or type of conflict and domain (urban counter-insurgency, air, naval, cyber, etc.). I argue in this chapter that the military labour process can be a site of class struggle over both labour-as-such and over the political power soldiers embody in that labour. The military union movement in the 1960s-70s demonstrates this.

However, this was not (and is not today) an established position of Marxist politics or thought, nor the international labour movement as a whole in the 1960s and 70s. While it is outside the scope of this chapter to comprehensively explore the relationship of the soldiers' union movement to the old or New Lefts, it is important to briefly address this. The Communist Parties of Italy and France were some of the most important forces opposed to the soldier resistance and unionism of the 1960s and 1970s in those countries;[10] they saw the unions as adventurist, dangerous, undisciplined, or ultra-left; were wary of provoking right-wing generals in these countries that had recent experiences with military coups; and denied or downplayed the class struggle within the army, identifying any intra-army conflict as secondary to the primary contradiction of monopoly capitalism and labour.[11] For this discussion of labour and class struggle, I posit that the soldiers' union movement *was* a moment of class struggle, but that it is not reducible to such. The opposition of the institutional centers of Marxism in Europe speak to the soldiers' movement's relationship to the May 1968 protests and New Left(s) – a rejection of communist parties' lines and theories – and its many eclectic and dynamic political practices, ideas, and ambitions.[12] While soldiers' and veterans activism is remembered primarily around anti-war and peace activism, the story of the union movements shows a real overlap between "old left" ideas of labour, class, and the union

[10] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 100–102. Exceptions were the DKP in West Germany; though the KPD-ML in same was against. Not to mention the diversity of other views of the broader left across the capitalist world on the subject. For Cortright and Watt's summaries of the pacifist critique (102), liberal critique (98–100), and bureaucracy-skeptical left (103–105).

[11] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 100–102. In Greece, the government of Papandreou was a disappointment to Greek soldiers apparently. (234)

[12] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Ed. Gregory Elliott (Verso, 2018).; Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017).

form, and the New Left currents and concerns about individual expression and freedoms, anti-racism, and counter-culture.

Recognizing the class struggle and labour struggle in the movement is important, not only for historical clarity, but for theoretical implications. Soldiers do not universally and automatically adopt the 'structural' antagonism they carry out in their labour-product, such that they must become non-workers vis-a-vis other workers. The alignment with the state – doing one's job cooperatively – is an achievement of management (the military) in the class struggle. Likewise, the union form has been politically fraught on the left for over a century, from Kautskyite and Leninist positions, to the New Left and anarchist rejections of trade unions as forms of hierarchy and bastions of state-collaboration with imperial foreign policy, racism, and sexism.[13] Soldiers unions, therefore, may appear doubly suspicious, akin to police unionism: a corrupted form of power for a corrupted form of labour.[14] There is good reason to approach the enduring soldiers unions today with such a perspective. However, in the period under discussion in this chapter, there is evidence of a very different political class position at play, indicating the danger of drawing any universal political presumptions from ahistorical class schema. While we cannot suspend structural analysis for individual contingencies, we also cannot naturalize the processes of discipline and re-fetishization that produce the class fraction or sub-class of working-class soldiers.

Not only are soldiers proletarians as described in chapter four, thus subject to the 'primary' contradiction of labour-capital in the entirety of the life course, they also experience class conflict in the labour process itself in the form of divisions of labour, hierarchy, arbitrary discipline, degrading treatment, institutionalized racism, poor living and working conditions, poor compensation, and inter-rank antagonism historically in many countries reflecting general social

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[13] Jeff Schuhrke, *Blue-Collar Empire: The Untold Story of US Labor's Global Anticommunist Crusade* (Verso, 2024).; "From Solidarity to Shock Therapy: The AFL-CIO and the Fall of Soviet Communism," *Labor and Working-Class History Association (LAWCHA)*, November 22, 2022.

[14] Reiner provides a compelling sociological study of the history of police unions in Britain and the challenges to class analysis similar to that in this project. R. Reiner, "The Police in the Class Structure," *British Journal of Law and Society* 5, no. 2 (1978): 166–84. On police unionism and police misconduct in the U.S.: Abdul Nasser Rad et al., "Police Unionism, Accountability, and Misconduct," *Annual Review of Criminology* 6, no. 1 (2023): 181–203.

classes.[15] These are the many types of grievances soldiers consciously expressed and cultivated in the 1960s-70s in the United States and the Netherlands, as well as in many other countries in Europe.[16]

In one of many reports[17] commissioned by the U.S. during and after the Vietnam War (Second Indochina War) (November 1 1955 – April 30 1975), and during the transition to the All-Volunteer Force, issues representative of the 1960s ideals of individual freedom were top of the list:

> … [T]here is in today's society a renewed concern for the dignity and worth of the individual. Loyalty and obedience to superiors are not given unquestioningly, but must be earned. They are not readily given by men who are forced to work at jobs that appear unworthwhile, demeaning, and unrewarding, or who are subjected to repression and harassment.[18]

In interviews, "[s]uch statements as "the Army treats us as animals, or dogs, or children" were not uncommon."[19] Classic labour grievances about "unnecessary make-work duties and practices", regulations, management practices, and pay followed, along with the draft and military law.

> Personal appearance standards, with hair regulations usually mentioned, was actually the third most frequently cited item. Fourth was the lack of communications between the lower EM and their superiors. Fifth on the list was the forced draft, sixth low pay, seventh was inequities of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), eighth was

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[15] The belief in the 'contact thesis', that military service changes social perceptions and increases social cohesions (to the advantage of unity coercion and military effectiveness), is pervasive in countries that maintain national service, but empirically disputed. Elisheva Rosman-Stollman, "Can Military Service Bridge Social Schisms: The Case of Israel," *Israel Affairs* 26, no. 3 (May 3, 2020): 348–70.

[16] From the 1960s into the 1990s, countries with soldiers union movements in various forms (political, non-political, formal, illicit) included: for which we have records of news reporting, research, interviews, or participation in ECCO, such as Australia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, East and West Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK. There may be many more that I have not been able to identify yet. For this period see: Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*. For a post-Cold War assessment, including Australia, Ireland, Slovenia, and South Africa, see: Richard Bartle, "Placing Military Unionism in a Comparative Perspective," in *Military Unionism In The Post-Cold War Era* (Routledge, 2006).; Lindy Heinecken, "An Overview of Military Unionism in the Post-Cold War Era," in *Military Unionism In The Post-Cold War Era*.

[17] See also: Howard C. Olson and R.W. Rae, "Determination of the Potential for Dissidence in the US Army. Volume 1: Nature of Dissent," (Research Analysis Corporation for the Department of the Army, February 1, 1971).

[18] R.W. Rae, et al., "Future Impact of Dissident Elements within the Army on the Enforcement of Discipline, Law, and Order," (Research Analysis Corporation for the Department of the Army, December 1, 1971), 73.

[19] Rae et al., "Future Impact of Dissident Elements," 72.

> inefficiency and mismanagement of the Army, and ninth was incompetent and inadequate leadership.
>
> In reality, although explicitly mentioned only ninth in frequency, inadequate leadership may well be a major contributing factor for most of the above complaints, except for low pay and the draft which Congress is now addressing.[20]

These complaints are not only about unfair work conditions, but carry with them an anti-authoritarian spirit in certain respects, notably the haircut regulations, which will be returned to later in this chapter.

The desire for *reason* rather than tradition to order the workplace is also characteristic of the time and apparent in these reports. A demand for rational organization butted up against the preference for paternalism, favoured by the military establishment and prevalent in the post-war period of the U.S. Military (despite right-wing free-market-oriented efforts at reform).[21] To this end, inconsistent and arbitrary application of policies and procedures is also cited: "new haircut policies are followed by some leaders, liberalized further by others, and mostly ignored by still others" and courts martial too appeared to be inconsistent and arbitrary. "If there are legitimate reasons for what seem like outdated practices they haven't usually been adequately explained to the troops."[22] In the post-war period the military had pitched itself as a place of care, support, and security rather than the promise of good pay that other workplaces offered.[23] The expressed desire for reason, consistency, and non-arbitrariness implies a quite moderate call for modernization: *bring the army into conformity with other workplaces*. We will return to precisely this question over the military's comparability to other workplaces in the second half of this chapter.

These types of grievances, for the most part, indicate quite modest broad-based cultural shifts, rather than political radicalism: "There appears to be a clear dichotomy between the values of the

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[20] Rae et al., "Future Impact of Dissident Elements," 72.

[21] Mittelstadt, *Rise of the Military Welfare State*, 45.

[22] Rae et al., "Future Impact of Dissident Elements," 72.

[23] Mittelstadt, *Rise of the Military Welfare State*, 45.

men presently entering the service and those to whom they are responsible — the [non-commissioned officers] NCOs.[24] It is open to question whether the Army can make both groups happy."[25] While not named explicitly in this summary, a significant element of the issues of 'dignity' raised seem to be racist harassment, as reflected in the summaries of what surveyed soldiers wanted to see change: "racial discussions and sensitivity training."[26] Other issues noted surround permitting some marijuana use. The report's narrative however finds that issues of "harassment and loss of personal dignity" are the priority for the study respondents: "This study underlines the major cause of discontent — it is not low pay or poor living conditions although they are contributory — rather it is harassment and loss of personal dignity. The [Modern] Volunteer Army [MVA] per se will not eliminate these."[27] And the solution they find is to improve leadership, particularly NCOs whom the (soon to be) enlisted soldiers confront directly in the workplace: "The success of the MVA and the control of dissidence will undoubtedly depend in large part on the leadership qualities of those who directly lead the troops."[28]

Many of these grievances were novel to the military workplace, due to the nature of the work, and many reflect broader changes in post-war society, such as greater expectations for personal expression within institutions and skepticism of tradition and authority.[29] As society as a whole had developed, culturally the military had become unacceptable to the people compelled by

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[24] NCOs are the lowest-ranking officers. Commissioned officers have typically graduated from an officer training program and/or have a post-secondary degree, whereas NCOs have been promoted from the enlisted ranks, and directly lead (enforce roles and responsibilities) smaller units of enlisted soldiers. They are a military equivalent of lower-management or line-managers.

[25] Rae et al., "Future Impact of Dissident Elements," 73.

[26] Rae et al., "Future Impact of Dissident Elements," 73.

[27] Rae et al., "Future Impact of Dissident Elements," 74.

[28] Rae et al., "Future Impact of Dissident Elements," 74.

[29] In this chapter I have not considered the Soviet Union or the Cold War generally, other than the specific phenomena of the Vietnam War era. Future research will take this significant dimension into account, specifically Cold War ideology about the self-image of the U.S. as a beacon of democracy and freedom and the relationship to the civil rights movement, the labour movement, and the New Left. See: Schurke, *Blue Collar Empire*; Samuel Moyn, *Liberalism Against Itself: Cold War Intellectuals and the Making of Our Times* (Yale University Press, 2023).; William Powell Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2013).

conscription to provide its labour power. These examples from the U.S. military had parallels all over the Western world, and for many of the soldiers, the solution they reached for was unionization.

5.2 Resistance and the Union Question

Across the many countries in which they took roots, the military union efforts of the 1960s-70s were varied. Some had their origins in peace activism and the 1968 uprisings, such as the Netherlands (to be discussed in some detail below) or in France, where the 1973 abolition of student deferment for military service not only motivated protests but brought experienced student activists directly into uniform, ultimately facing extreme repression by the state.[30] Others were conservative and cooperatively oriented towards the employer and the state, most straightforwardly in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, where their respective Social Democratic governments preemptively established company unions that limited the possibility of real collective power.[31] Many soldiers and pro-union voices spoke in the language of the military, seeking workplace protections and moderate reforms for the benefit of the institution, country, and professional soldiers. In many countries, the government and military nonetheless saw a radical threat on its doorstep.

5.2.1 Is a soldiers' union contradictory?

As mentioned already, there are conservative, liberal, socialist, and anarchist justifications for political suspicion of unions. Soldiers unions likewise present problems from all these perspectives. An intuitive left-wing perspective might be that soldiers are bad, contrary to left-wing politics, and unions are good (even with reservations). Does the historical proliferation of soldier unions make this intuition unjustified?

A trade union is an organization of workers created for the purpose of improving the conditions of labour, improving pay and benefits, advocating for social and political goals, and regulating the

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[30] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 171.

[31] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 128.

employment relationship. Typically, this happens through collective bargaining, where employees are represented in negotiation with the employers' representatives. There are many variations by country, industry, and time period. The particularity of the workplace; the labour process; the struggle of conditions, hours, and pay, are all the subjects of struggle between capital and labour. Beyond the legalistic understanding, a union describes a literal union or association of workers (often but not necessarily institutionalized as a legally-recognized union) to collectively assert their power in that workplace to improve upon these conditions. The freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining are recognized human rights and international law.[32] There is nevertheless power within this form as union presence in a workplace can impose (and enforce) legal requirements on the employer that they might otherwise not concede to (from the simple requirement of meetings, to human rights laws); in other words, it diminishes authoritarian capacities of the employer.

The union is arguably the most powerful working class organization yet invented for politicizing and building the skills of collective political life. There is political conflict and struggle within the labour movement to harness this power and to make unions into the political force commensurate with its often latent potential.[33] It is also famously fraught and conservative at a basic level, as unions seek improvements *within* capitalism, an industry, a firm, or the labour process.[34] Even in their most radical and powerful forms unions are *structurally* contradictory entities. Organized labour can make all kinds of demands upon the employer. The first type is a claim upon the workplace, which could be for better conditions in the workplace or for greater workers' control over the workplace. Both, in and of themselves, leave the question of the workplace's existence aside or affirmed. The second type is a claim upon society/the state and implicitly or explicitly for the benefit of people outside of the union or workplace; the first can be used in connection with

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[32] See: International Labour Organization (ILO). "Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work," 1998.

[33] Jane McAlevey, *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age* (Oxford University Press, 2016).; Eric Blanc, *We Are the Union: How Worker-to-Worker Organizing Is Revitalizing Labor and Winning Big* (University of California Press, 2025). Frederic Jameson argues that unions are past their prime as a viable avenue for dual power; he provocatively argues for the U.S. military as an alternative. Fredric Jameson, *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army* Ed. Slavoj Žižek (Verso, 2016).

[34] David McNally, *Another World Is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism* (Arbeiter Ring Pub, 2006), 208.

this but not necessarily. In contemporary parlance this has been articulated as 'bargaining for the common good'[35]: in effect, workers can make a claim to power over the uses of their work in society. As should be apparent, political claims[36] are also made when invoking 'the common good' and what that might consist of.[37] Typically however, labour tries to ameliorate their workplace and its role in society, rather than undermine its very existence.

The left-wing "reality principle" critique, as Michael Denning puts it, has come from many corners:

> the labor movement often did find itself committed to the political economy of capitalism, to a variety of productionisms that made an absolute virtue of work: trade unions that found themselves disciplining work forces and enforcing no-strike pledges; militants who saw women's entry into wage labor as a necessary step in the emancipation of women; anarcho-syndicalists whose notions of workers' control celebrated labor as central to manliness; Stakhanovite communists for whom "voluntary" work brigades were necessary to the building of socialism.[38]

At first glance, some may see the military as compatible with the goals of socialism – all state socialisms have had militaries – and others may see the two in total opposition – militarism representing the worst of both capitalism and state socialism, and something for positive socialist theory today to reject. Military unions therefore seem to not appeal to either. Denning continues to say, "The contrary traditions that, in [Dipesh] Chakrabarty's words, remind 'us of other ways of being human than as bearers of the capacity to labor' — movements for sexual, spiritual, or cultural transformation — have always seemed somewhat suspect to the reality-principle of the

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[35] From the U.S. education-workers context: "A bargaining strategy where educators and their unions join together with parents and other stakeholders to demand change that benefits not just educators, but students and the community as a whole." National Education Association. "Bargaining for the Common Good." Accessed June 20, 2023.

[36] As discussed throughout this dissertation, by 'political' I don't just mean 'pertaining to the state or electoral politics but to describe social relations writ large usually divided up into categories of the political, social, economic, ecological, and so on.

[37] For a critical intervention on the matter, see: Diana Reddy, "Labor Bargaining and the 'Common Good,'" *LPE Project*, July 29, 2021.

[38] Denning, "Representing Global Labor," 142.

labor movements."[39] An aim of this project, demystifying the labour that composes the military, implies not only control over the social product of all labour, but human emancipation: ways of being human other than as bearers of the capacity to labour. On the way to abolition of the value form and its forms of life and death, however, is the reality wherein people experience their contradictions. As we will explore in this chapter, the movements of soldiers unions drew upon the 'old left' union form and reality principle – how to make changes in the course of service, how to advocate for comrades in courts martial – and at the same time were informed by New Left political currents, drawing connections between the exploitation of the draft and the racial and sexual violence around U.S. military bases, for example.

Why would *soldiers* form unions? Soldiers unions varied in origins and organization. The important through-line is the basic union concept of a collective workers organization, outside and independent of the chain of command, advocating for shared interests, including the right to participate in decisions about their work life. While these unions were, largely, conservative in the sense of affirming the existence of the workplace, that quality does not prohibit them from doing something more radical at the same time: this is a feature of unionism writ large, rather than a specific contradiction of the military workplace.

5.2.2 Soldiers' Unions in the Advanced Capitalist Armies

Unionization became an issue in the late 1960s and 1970s, with the 1970s being the high watermark of debate and discussion, particularly because of unionization debate and activity surrounding soldiers in the U.S. In the late 1960s, soldiers across the capitalist world took part in and developed their own social movements, often connected to the New Left. Part of this was the phenomenon of conscripted soldiers organizing *as* soldiers and workers, including in the form of unions.[40]

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[39] Denning, "Representing Global Labor," 142.

[40] Professional organizations of officers and high-ranking military personnel long predated them, skewed conservative, and fit into and alongside the military establishment in many countries. From the 19th century to the 1930s, these were professional and social organizations more than organizations for improving wages and conditions. From WWII however they became more occupationally oriented than the old aristocratic-professional view of 'service' or 'calling'. See: Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*.

Though expressed in different normative terms, the debate in Cold War capitalist democracies echo debates on the Militia Question because they go to the heart of the contradiction of the state's monopoly on violence. Göran Therborn writes that the state is at once an expression of class domination (a particular form of the class division of labour in capitalist society) and the executor of the supreme rule-making (and -applying, -enforcing, -adjudicating, -defending) tasks of society, an intrinsic unity. This dynamic means that the state itself as an apparatus generates new problems (of government, administration, repression, judicature) which call into question the existing organizational forms of domination.[41]

One such problem that developed in capitalist society was precisely the primary institution of state repression depending upon proletarians. Over time the advantages and disadvantages for class rule have shifted and new problems have been generated along with it. As discussed in previous chapters, proletarians were, unlike feudal soldiers, 'doubly free' in the classical Marxist sense: they were free to contract with any employer and free from land and so needed to seek out wages in exchange for their labour-power.[42] While they were not bound as feudal soldiers were to lords, or tied to the natural demands of agricultural work and life, they did have the compulsion of wage dependency to lead them to various avenues for procuring food and shelter – the army was sometimes mandatory, sometimes one dependable option.[43] With the development of modern capitalism and the developments of bourgeois democracy, more and more the state had to balance individual freedoms with the staffing of militaries.

Even more pressure was put on this balance with the growth of that troublesome development of capitalist society: proletarian politics, including theory, unionism, and eventually parties. Through capital's voracious development and proletarian fights for greater share in the distribution of

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[41] Therborn, *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?*, 47-48.

[42] "For the transformation of money into capital, therefore, the owner of money must find the free worker available on the commodity-market; and this worker must be free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for sale." Marx, *Capital*, 272.

[43] The varieties of military service regime are too many to detail: but it should be kept in mind that baselines of health and physical wellbeing tended to disqualify the most marginalized in society; it was often a promising option of upward mobility for those already of a (marginally) higher class fraction.

wealth and attendant cultural standards of living, pressure grew to bring military work more in line with civilian work, but this pressure reached a boiling point in the postwar period. This came from two directions. Firstly, retention required standards akin to postwar successes of union collective bargaining; if people were going to make careers out of the military it should be competitive with industrial careers – dangerous civilian work had the advantages of collective bargaining (though unevenly profiting from them were workers of different racial and ethnic groups, which partly explains why African Americans disproportionately found work in the military).[44] Secondly, the New Left and the Cold War popularized anti-authoritarian ideologies which took hold as politicized conscripts took up places in armies. The first pressure was more materialistic and could be accommodated – for a time – amid the postwar boom in the United States, while countries devastated rather than enriched by WWII were not able to build up comparable military welfare states.[45] The second pressure was more directly political, demanding more internal power for soldiers in their places of work.

The military, as an institution of capitalist class society, is repressive and dependent on an internal vulnerability, labour-power. Labour-power is conceptually separate from the people who perform it, representing very real alienation. These people are in capitalist society, for the most part, citizens, who have democratic expectations of representation from their government and civil rights of speech and association and protest, but who work in an institution antithetical to a meaningful expression of such democratic values because of its existence as a political form of capitalist social relations. In this way, the military is an ideal expression of not only the alienation of labour, but the political alienation of labour, and the fetishization of state power, which like the power of capital, is really the capacity of organized, cooperative labour.

From the 1960s, left-wing conscript organizations and committees of low-ranking soldiers emerged in Western Europe and were largely novel. Initially, inchoate actions began the

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[44] Mittelstadt, *Rise of the Military Welfare State*. This is also, speculatively, what makes military service attractive to LGBTQ people.

[45] Indeed, the prosperity of "civilian" society in the post-war boom is significantly accounted for by military Keynesian multiplier effects from military industries according to T. Barker, "Cold War Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Military Spending, 1947-1990," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2022).

movement, consisting of conscientious objection, desertion, unauthorized absenteeism, and later organized protest and demonstration around the Vietnam War.[46] These were a part of the general politicization of the period, as well as military-specific discontent, and were sometimes supported by civilian groups.[47] Soldiers movements formed in the Netherlands, France, East and West Germany, Scandinavia, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. The resistance of soldiers in the U.S. army during the Vietnam war is the most famous: protesting against the war itself as well as conditions of those carrying it out.[48] Through political agitation, the European conscripts argued that the military could not be an exception to social change; the Netherlands is the most striking case for its success organizationally and politically.

5.2.3 The Dutch "Hair" Army

The most successful military unionization effort, in most estimates, took place in the Netherlands. In 1966, the *Vereniging voor Dienstplichtige Militairen* (VVDM) (Association for Conscripts) was founded. In 1968 it had 5,000 members (10 percent of conscripts) and by 1970 it could boast 30,000 members or 70% of all conscripts.[49] The founding of the VVDM and the conscripts' movement generally are considered one of the most significant outgrowths of the immense 1960s political and cultural youth radicalism in the country. Methods of political protest that soldiers employed reflected the anti-authoritarian principles of the time, and features of military life and

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[46] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 2.

[47] The connection between soldiers' movements and the broader social movements was apparent at the time; Teitler recounts opinions at a conference in 1973: "the expectation was voiced that the [Vereniging voor Dienstplichtige Militairen (VVDM)] was an organization soon destined to disappear. This opinion was based on the observation that all over the Western world the student protests were on the decline and that soldier unions, only able to develop in the wake of these protests, also would have to decline. The end of the Viet Nam war would, furthermore, even in faraway Holland, remove a source of general irritation and frustration to the conscripts." Ger Teitler, "The Successful Case of Military Unionization in The Netherlands," *Armed Forces & Society* 2, no. 4 (1976): 517.

[48] Tom Wilber and Jerry Lembcke, *Dissenting POWs: From Vietnam's Hoa Lo Prison to America Today* (Monthly Review Press, 2021).; Amy J. Rutenberg, *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance* (Cornell University Press, 2019).; Carver et al., *Waging Peace in Vietnam*; David Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds: Antiwar Coffeehouses and Military Dissent in the Vietnam Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017).; David Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance during the Vietnam War* (Haymarket Books, 2005).

[49] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 2. Teitler, "The Successful Case of Military Unionization in The Netherlands."

work seen as anachronistic were the targets of early demands: protesting the practice of saluting and haircut regulations as well as poor living conditions in barracks.[50]

Surprisingly, at its founding the union was relatively well-received by the military leadership and government. Many of the reforms conscripts advocated for aligned with leadership's aims to make the service more attractive and competitive as an employer.[51] This was aligned with broader government and corporate administrative efforts to move toward "cooperative management", where rationality was thought to be more effective than traditional discipline and punishment.[52] In fact, officers were some early allies of the conscript unionists, albeit for strategic reasons as managers: they hoped this would help modernize the army and "channel conscript grievances into controllable outlets."[53] As well as officers and government, media and the minister of defence mounted no opposition, giving unionists sympathetic portrayals on the one hand and free rein to organize on the other. As for the form of the union itself, the Dutch had already accepted military "interest organizations" of officers and career NCOs. While this is also the case in the U.S. and other countries more hostile to soldier unionism, it is nonetheless noted by certain authors as a part of the Dutch difference in accepting the soldier union movement.[54] In fact, it was NCOs, mid-level officers, who were the group most hostile to conscript unionism in the Netherlands.[55]

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[50] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 2.

[51] Teitler, "The Successful Case of Military Unionization in The Netherlands."

[52] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 108-109.

[53] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 109. This echoes the "new spirit of capitalism" framework developed by Boltanski and Chiapello in the French context; the movements' radical critique of capitalism's authoritarianism was absorbed and co-opted to endure through the justificatory crisis of the 1960s. Boltanski and Chiapello 2018. The 'spirit of capitalism' is an ideological regime that re/justifies commitment to capitalism. This is a useful framework for helping to explain the enduring cooperation of people who do not benefit from the structure of capitalist social relations. For a recent use of this framework for the globalized artisan economy, see: Kirstin Munro and Chris O'Kane, "Autonomy and Creativity in the Artisan Economy and the New Spirit of Capitalism," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 49, no. 4 (December 1, 2017): 582–90.

[54] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 67-69; 109.

[55] Teitler, "The Successful Case of Military Unionization in The Netherlands." Enlisted-NCO relations are frequently reported as the major point of conflict, as NCOs are the lowest level of management essentially, but usually only with moderately better compensation and status than the soldiers they are in charged with overseeing. Marx compared NCOs to factory foremen: "An industrial army of workers under the command of a capitalist requires, like a real army,

From 1966-69, the VVDM thus managed to cooperate well with military leadership. By 1969, however, the organization's members became increasingly activist. Politically, the VVDM was shadowed by the BVD (League of Conscripts), an independent caucus of conscripts and civilians that also worked within the union actively as a left flank; members included civilians, young veterans, and women activists as well as active-duty soldiers. BVD began as a group for conscientious objectors in 1967, later shifting to struggle *within* the army, maintaining political pressure on the VVDM and maintaining the political skills cultivated by activist soldiers in the course of fighting for the unions and the demands they hoped the union organizational form would facilitate.[56] Speaking to the contradictions of union bureaucratization, one BVD member recounted: "The moment a soldier moves from the tank to the typewriter, he begins to lose touch with the membership; in particular, he is no longer subject to the daily trials and harassment of barracks life."[57] Notably, the BVD members were political, critiquing the Netherlands' role in NATO and deployment of nuclear cruise missiles.[58] Decades later, a commentator from the Dutch Ministry of Defense described in a NATO-oriented magazine both the BVD and VVDM in extreme terms retrospectively:

> [The BVD] was a revolutionary soldiers movement which endeavoured to render the armed forces unfit as an instrument for maintaining the capitalist system. This should be achieved by fostering anticapitalist feelings among the enlisted men, and by infiltrating [the VVDM]... thus undermining the armed forces from the inside.[59]

The two most visible and popular successes of the Dutch conscripts were not great threats to national security or capital. Both prompted by military overreaction to individual acts of rebellion, these reforms became highly symbolic challenges to military authority and tradition. In 1971, the

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officers (managers) and N.C.O.s (foremen, overseers), who command during the labour process in the name of capital." Marx, *Capital*, 450.

[56] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 103-106.

[57] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 104. In this sense, union representatives are sometimes perceived as akin to lower management – or NCOs in this case. Separated from the reality of the job by virtue of petty separation or authority. See the discussion of political deskilling below regarding union bureaucracy.

[58] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 112-113.

[59] Daniel G Pronk, "Watchers on the Invisible Front: Military Counterintelligence at the Dawn of the 'Dangerous Decade,'" *Atlantisch Perspectief* 41, no. 6 (2017): 9–14.

union were victorious in making haircuts optional, and in 1973, new regulations made saluting optional, a sign of earned respect rather than compulsory deference to superiors.[60] Over these years the VVDM and BVD activists also fought for compensation for overtime, asking for time off rather than pay. This involved protests and strike-like actions, ultimately leading to success in 1975. A minor action in this campaign was more directly political: 400 soldiers protested the appearance of the prime minister, demanding "*ƒ*-15" not "F-16" – a 15 guilder pay raise instead of the multibillion dollar purchase of U.S. military aircraft.[61] They also were highly active in international solidarity with West German and U.S. soldiers, particularly over the question of hair – which will be discussed in the section on the U.S. In this period, particularly after the hair victory, the military police exercised periodic repression – arrests and censorship of conscripts' newspapers were especially notable.[62] The Dutch soldiers and their movement's most impressive act, perhaps, was prompted in 1978.

5.2.3.1 The UNIFIL Resistance: An International Solidarity of Refusal

In late 1978, the Dutch government received an urgent request from the UN Secretary-General's military adviser, Colonel T.K. Dibuama, to provide a self-sufficient infantry battalion to UNIFIL, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (1978-present). UNIFIL was created by the March 1978 Security Council resolutions 425 and 426 to "confirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security and assist the Lebanese Government in restoring its effective authority in the area."[63] The surprising request came amidst the mission seeing several significant contributor-states withdraw battalions. The Netherlands had had a long-standing peacekeeping unit on standby for the UN, but with an understanding that they were not the UN's first choice. As a NATO member, the Netherlands lacked the prerequisite neutrality for

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[60] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 113-115.

[61] The florin sign *ƒ* was the symbol for the guilder, the currency of the Netherlands until the Euro was introduced in 2002.

[62] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*.

[63] Ben Schoenmaker, "The Debate on the Netherlands Contribution to UNIFIL, 1979–85," *International Peacekeeping* 12, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 587. The 1978 South Lebanon conflict or the First Israeli invasion of Lebanon lasted from March 14–21 1978. See: "UNIFIL Background," *UNIFIL | United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon*. https://unifil.unmissions.org/unifil-background.

peacekeeping missions; many non-Western states were mistrustful of it as a former colonial power, especially following the post-WWII wars of decolonization and the 1958-62 war with Indonesia over New Guinea[64]; and furthermore, Dutch military leadership prioritized their NATO commitments over UN ones.[65] This latter factor had resulted in the Dutch military reducing UN training, leaving political leadership at the Ministry of Defence unaware of the unpreparedness of the battalion when in January 1979[66] the government of the Netherlands agreed to send 700 troops initially to Lebanon, with a plan to ultimately send 8000 troops in total.[67]

The decision to send Dutch troops to Lebanon was immediately unpopular with the public, which the government had not anticipated. Not only were the soldiers not well-trained for peacekeeping generally,[68] let alone for a mission already seen (including by the Dutch government) to be hopeless, but it would involve sending a significant number of conscripts who were not willing to be deployed – either to Lebanon specifically or on combat missions at all. This latter point became the focus of debate on UNIFIL participation. Previous Dutch peacekeeping contributions in Cold War missions had been able to be fulfilled by battalions of volunteers (Korea 1950–1954 and Congo 1960–1963), whereas UNIFIL presented new complications.[69] A significant number of

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[64] Margot Tudor, "Gatekeepers to Decolonisation: Recentring the UN Peacekeepers on the Frontline of West Papua's Re-Colonisation, 1962–3," *Journal of Contemporary History* 57, no. 2 (May 2021): 293–316.

[65] Schoenmaker, "Debate on the Netherlands contribution to UNIFIL," 588; Christ Klep, "Peacekeepers in a Warlike Situation: The Dutch Experience," (Landesverteidigungsakademie und Büro für Sicherheitspolitik, Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung, October 1998), 60–61.

[66] Military leadership had slowly "reduced the UN training without informing the political leadership at the Ministry of Defence. By 1977, the original two-week exercise programme had been reduced to a one-day training course." Schoenmaker, "Debate on the Netherlands contribution to UNIFIL," 588.

[67] See: *The New York Times*. "Dutch Agree to Give 700 Soldiers For U.N. Force in South Lebanon." January 13, 1979, sec. Archives.

[68] "UNIFIL was a troublesome peacekeeping operation from the start. All in all, over a period of six years, more than 8000 Dutch peacekeepers would be needed for this mission. This personnel mainly belonged to the mechanized UN-battalion which had been dedicated for standby duty in the sixties. In 1979 it was understaffed, undermanned and hardly trained for UN duty. Now the battalion had six weeks to prepare for 'the real thing'. Only a single company from the battalion was actually ready for deployment when the UN-Secretariat put out its first feelers. This sorry state of affairs - at least from the point of view of the Foreign Ministry - was the result of the complicated conscription and manning system of that time. One company from the battalion was combat ready, one was in training, the other two companies were on leave." Klep, "Peacekeepers in a Warlike Situation," 61.

[69] Klep, "Peacekeepers in a Warlike Situation," 61.

conscripts who found themselves facing deployment had volunteered for the stand-by mechanized UN battalion for banal reasons: these barracks happened to be close to their homes, allowing them to return home from work at night.[70] Furthermore, these conscripts were now unionized. Nonetheless, the defense minister and army leadership decided that the battalion should be sent in its existing composition, that is including the 600 conscripts, to not compromise the close-knit quality of the unit.[71]

The VVDM took no political position, while the BVD vocally opposed the operation on the grounds of solidarity with Palestinians and an analysis of the peacekeeping force's role as anti-Arab.[72] Along with individual soldiers attaching their name to the case, VVDM legally contested the deployment of conscripts in the UNIFIL operation as unlawful.[73] There were lively street protests in the Netherlands opposing the deployment; archival images show the use of a living camel. The organization of soldiers with high support outside the military, particularly from parents' groups, resulted in success: union actions resulted in UNIFIL deployment being restricted to volunteers, and only 120 conscripts in total, from the initial deployment, were sent to Lebanon against their will.[74] This organization did not prevent or alter the course of events in Lebanon towards the political direction that some Dutch conscripts and their organization may have desired, but they achieved a mass conscientious objection and an international solidaristic refusal to participate in a politically objectionable mission, exercising popular democratic power over their own labour, in opposition to the government. This case demonstrates the divergent ideas of

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[70] Klep, "Peacekeepers in a Warlike Situation," 61–62.

[71] Schoenmaker, "Debate on the Netherlands contribution to UNIFIL," 589.

[72] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 104. The fighting of the early years of UNIFIL meant that Dutch conscripts would be potentially facing what initial troops (from France, Norway, Sweden, etc.) did: peacekeeper-soldiers were engaged in fighting against Marxist-Leninist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) fighters, opposing their military objectives. See: "Jun 1979 - Israeli Invasion of Southern Lebanon, March 1978 - Deployment of UN Peace-Keeping Force - Israeli Withdrawal," *Keesing's Record of World Events* (June 1979).

There is little information on this in English, but I would like to research this further in the future.

[73] "VVDM v. The State of the Netherlands, 08 February 1980," *International Law Reports* 78 (1988): 13–17.

[74] Mark J. Kurlansky, "Talented Dutch Army – Vital to NATO – Marches to Its Own Beat," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 10, 1983.; Klep, "Peacekeepers in a Warlike Situation," 62.

democracy, representational and popular-syndicalist. It's a unique example of an assertion of ownership over labour even more so than over the institution, as the institution is composed of social labour.

5.3 Unionizing the Heart of Empire: The U.S. Military

The Dutch case was unusual both in its formal and political success and in its ideological-political quality. In most cases, from the Netherlands to the U.S. and elsewhere, nothing in soldier unions' demands and beliefs was more radical than could be found in society in general. What was threatening was that soldiers themselves were voicing these views *as soldiers* and not as private citizens.[75]

5.3.1 The American Servicemen's Union and the International Working-Class Imaginary

In the U.S., as the 20th century progressed, the form of soldiering changed along with developments of capitalist society: class composition and difference, particularly at the level of market relations changed dramatically, as did political forms, with expansions of the franchise and civil rights and later decolonization post-WWII. The labour movement had developed from illicit organizations in the 19th century to radical forces for domestic and international politics in the 1920s and 1930s, to institutions of the postwar capitalist states.[76] In the United States, the AFL-CIO amalgamation in 1955 and the consolidation of trade unions *into* the state apparatus changed the political balance of the movement's majority just as the Cold War began to take shape.[77]

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[75] The soldier as a constitutional fiction is a non-person; many human rights and freedoms are suspended not only as technical requirements but as ideological ones too. The constitutional dynamic is something I would like to investigate more in the future.

[76] In the US, the 1930s were a high point of labour radicalism, with the IWW and the Communist Party as well as the Jewish Labour Bund and other traditions organizing in highly political ways – socialist, anarchist, antifascist, anti-racist, etc. – often connected with domestic and international political objectives and movements.

[77] By 'into' the state apparatus, I do not refer to institutions with specifically and consciously state-aligned or capitalist political commitments. To *that* end, there however is extensive research on the US labour movement and the Cold War, particularly on the AFL-CIO. In general terms, we can refer to Althusser's conceptualization of the state apparatuses.

In the 1960s, there were at least two efforts to organize a union of U.S. soldiers. The American Servicemen's Union (ASU) was short-lived, founded on Christmas Day 1967 and phased out in the 1970s at the end of the Vietnam War. By July 1969 it claimed 6500 members.[78] It was highly political and was never formally recognized by the military and government leadership. As a union, its focus was on low-ranking servicemen, and its immediate organizing issues were "rank-and-file democracy in the army, the right to refuse orders, a fair wage and collective bargaining, an end to racism in the army, and the right of free political association."[79]

Ezra S. Krendel, scholar and lifelong DOD researcher, writing in 1977, said the ASU had no connection to the organized labour movement and was "a trade union in name only" an assessment made in passing based on the criteria that "its members were not and did not want to be stakeholders in a military career."[80] Revealingly, the anti-career, political orientation of the organization and its membership rendered it outside Krendel's conceptualization of unionism. The establishment American labour movement in the Cold War was defined precisely against communism and international solidarity.[81] Indeed, the ASU was not merely disinterested in military careers, but was an anti-war organization at the height of the U.S. war on Vietnam and influenced ideologically by the Trotskyist Workers World (WW) Party – the United States considered ASU as a "front organization" for the WW, speaking about it in similar ways that the

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[78] Ezra S., Krendel and Bernard Samoff, *Unionizing the Armed Forces* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 2.

[79] Jessie Kindig, "GI Movement: Antiwar Soldiers at Fort Lewis, 1965-1973," *Antiwar and Radical History Project - Pacific Northwest Project,* 2008.

[80] Krendel et al., *Unionizing the Armed Forces*, 2.

[81] See: Anthony Carew, *American Labour's Cold War Abroad: From Deep Freeze to Détente, 1945-1970* (Athabasca University Press, 2018).; Robert W. Cherny, William Issel, and Kieran Walsh Taylor, eds. *American Labor and the Cold War: Grassroots Politics and Postwar Political Culture* (Rutgers University Press, 2004).; Colin J. Davis, "American Labor's Global Ambassadors: The International History of the AFL-CIO during the Cold War," *Labor* 13, no. 2 (May 1, 2016): 142–44.; Rosemary Feurer, "Cold War in the American Working Class," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History* (2022).; Schuhrke 2024; 2022.; Dustin Walcher, "Reforming Latin American Labor: The AFL-CIO and Latin America's Cold War," in *American Labor's Global Ambassadors: The International History of the AFL-CIO during the Cold War*, ed. Robert Anthony Waters and Geert van Goethem (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013), 123–35

BVD was spoken about in the Netherlands.[82] This was not total paranoiac fabrication; Trotskyist organizations and parties *did* seek "to channel widespread antiwar sentiment into a full-scale working-class rebellion in the U.S. Army", which included not only connections to the ASU but also G.I. coffeehouses, publications, and other modes of political activity.[83]

Founder and chairman Andy Stapp[84] said in a 1969 interview that the ASU "is essentially a resistance movement which was formed to encourage GIs to fight against the war, which we believe to be an imperialist war."[85] Their demands focused on the war and racism in foreign policy and within the army. He emphasized that the union was not a political party; its membership was composed of men with "extremely varied" motives and consciousness, some supporting the National Liberation Front, but "other guys simply don't want to go there and get their ass shot off", and many more "feel that the war doesn't accomplish anything, as they'd say. It's a waste and the Vietnamese are getting hurt and that's very bad and the GIs don't benefit from it."[86] 6000 soldiers, all of whom opposed the war, "banded together to fight against being sent to Vietnam."[87]

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[82] "Workers World Party and Its Front Organizations, "US House Committee on Internal Security (April 1974). [link not located]; Robert J Alexander, *International Trotskyism, 1929-1985: A Documented Analysis of the Movement*. (Duke University Press, 1991).

[83] Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds*, 6.

[84] "'A remarkable aspect of Stapp's siege of Fort Sill is that the self-proclaimed Communist has never been lynched by his fellow G.I.s,' Robert Christgau wrote in a 1968 profile of Mr. Stapp in Esquire magazine. 'G.I.s are taught to kill Communists. But they like Stapp. When he won his second court-martial, they cheered. You just don't win courts-martial.'" Obituary in the *New York Times*: "Andy Stapp, Who Tried to Unionize the Military, Dies at 70," *The New York Times* September 14, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/15/us/andy-stapp-soldier-who-tried-to-unionize-the-military-dies-at-70.html

"...Stapp, who enlisted in 1967 and proceeded to organize a soldier's union called the American Servicemen's Union. His efforts earned him a swift discharge in 1968, but Stapp and the American Servicemen's Union continued to organize soldiers throughout the Vietnam era, and Stapp himself was a regular fixture in GI coffeehouses and at GI movement events. Though it never gained official recognition and dissolved after the war's end, Stapp's union in the 1970s claimed tens of thousands of members, with chapters at nearly every military base around the world. Stapp's radicalism, like that of many activists in the GI movement, drew on principles from labor and other left organizations." Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds*, 6.

[85] Fifth Estate Collective, "American Servicemen's Union," *Fifth Estate Magazine* 81, June 12, 1969, https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/81-june-12-25-1969/american-servicemens-union/.

[86] Fifth Estate Collective, "American Servicemen's Union."

[87] Fifth Estate Collective, "American Servicemen's Union."

In these terms, there are echoes of the ASU's soldiers' orientation toward anti-war action in the BVD organization against the UNIFIL deployment a decade later. Speculatively, we may imagine Dutch soldiers holding a similar range of beliefs and attitudes. Most significantly, however, is the prominence of the *union form* of collective organization in both the U.S. and Europe. Conscientious objection, the "ability to exit" or escape the draft, was a longstanding approach; to it was added the transformative potential of union organization and power in the production process.[88]

The ASU's newspaper, *The Bond*, was a vehicle for political education[89] – but it was ultimately one of dozens of G.I. newspapers, and not unique in its anti-imperial analysis. ASU's theory of imperialism identified the connection between imperialism abroad and racial domination in the United States.[90] "We feel that the question of racism is of equal importance as the question of the war," Stapp said. "It can be raised directly in relation to the war, which is racist. Black GIs get all the shit over there. And of course the Vietnamese are suffering racist brutality on the part of the U.S. army."[91] The case of the Fort Hood 43 illustrates this political orientation – the union form was not, however, a singular organizing vehicle, but part of a broader network.

5.3.1.1 The Fort Hood 43 and the Berlin Brothers

The Fort Hood 43 were forty-three Black soldiers based out of Fort Hood (Texas).[92] They had been assigned as riot-control police to the August 1968 Democratic Party Convention in Chicago. But

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[88] Gourevitch contrasts the value of union organization with the freedom to leave an unsatisfactory contract. Alex Gourevitch, "Labor Republicanism and the Transformation of Work," *Political Theory* 41, no. 4 (2013): 591–617.

[89] Fifth Estate Collective, "American Servicemen's Union."

[90] For an explanation of this analysis: Robert Knox and Ntina Tzouvala, "Looking Eastwards: The Bolshevik Theory of Imperialism and International Law," in *Revolutions in International Law*, ed. Kathryn Greenman, Anne Orford, Anna Saunders, and Ntina Tzouvala (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 27–55.

[91] Fifth Estate Collective, "American Servicemen's Union."

[92] Fort Hood was renamed Fort Cavazos in 2023 after the US Army's first Hispanic four-star general, one of several Confederate namesake bases renamed by the 2021 Naming Commission. It was renamed Fort Hood "on June 11, 2025, following an announcement by President Donald Trump that all nine installations would revert to their original names, in honor of recognized military heroes." The original namesake was Confederate Gen. John Bell Hood, and now World War I soldier, Col. Robert Benjamin Hood. Todd South, "Fort Cavazos renamed Fort Hood,

the soldiers had recent events in mind: Martin Luther King, Jr., had been assassinated earlier that year in April, following which thousands of U.S. soldiers were deployed from Fort Hood for riot duty – in Stapp's words "domestic counterinsurgency"[93] – in Chicago, killing several Black people. "Black soldiers," historian David Parson writes, "many of whom had recently returned from Vietnam, were especially angry, and increasing numbers resented their role in what the army called 'civil disturbance control.'"[94] That summer at Fort Hood, the main base for riot-control training and deployment, Black soldiers got organized.[95]

That August, the night before deployment, sixty soldiers staged a sit-in on base: refusing deployment to Chicago where they would be "in the role of pigs to suppress people."[96] Forty-three of them stayed put long enough to be court-martialed and sentenced to hard labour ranging three to six months, wage forfeiture, and rank reduction. Not all of them were union members, but the ASU "pushed very hard," Stapp recounts, which prompted some white soldiers to leave the union.[97] Fort Hood was exemplary of the racism in the U.S. military, with regular "altercations" between Black and white soldiers, escalating into "what authorities characterized as 'race riots' in April [1969]."[98] But Stapp recalled, "They requested our support and we gave it to them to the

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honoring WWI soldier," *Army Times*, July 29, 2025, https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2025/07/29/fort-cavazos-renamed-fort-hood-honoring-wwi-soldier/.

[93] Fifth Estate Collective, "American Servicemen's Union."

[94] Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds*, 43.

[95] Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds*, 43. There was a surge of Black labour action in the wake of Dr. King's assassination – particularly in the public sector. It's very possible that the Fort Hood soldiers were aware of these events, but this would require more research. See: William P. Jones, "From Atlanta to Memphis: Southern Sanitation Workers and the Transformation of Public Employee Unions, 1941-1968," in *Public Workers in Service of America: A Reader*, ed. Frederick W. Gooding, Eric Steven Yellin, Joseph A. McCartin, and Eileen Boris (University of Illinois Press, 2023), 130–48.; "The Essential Worker: A History from the Progressive Era to COVID-19," *Labor* 20, no. 4 (December 1, 2023): 6–23.; "The Other Operation Dixie: Public Employees and the New Deal Order," in *Capitalism Contested: The New Deal and Its Legacies*, ed. Romain Huret, Nelson Lichtenstein, and Jean-Christian Vinel (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).; "The Unknown Origins of the March on Washington: Civil Rights Politics and the Black Working Class," *Labor* 7, no. 3 (September 1, 2010): 33–52.; *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2013).

[96] Fifth Estate Collective, "American Servicemen's Union."

[97] Fifth Estate Collective, "American Servicemen's Union."

[98] Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds*, 45.

extent that some of the white GIs in the union who were a little bit racist quit the union because they were upset that we took such a strong stand. We educated a lot of the guys about racism and a lot of [B]lack GIs were tremendously inspired."[99]

The 1968 DNC is now a historical case of anti-war and anti-racist protest and police brutality. This effort of the ASU, in Stapp's telling at least, speaks to the possibilities of real union action embedded in broader, politicized social movement[100] – in this case, Black liberation and civil rights, the anti-war movement, and the coffeehouses – not only claiming power over to what end the product of your labour is put (even negatively) and the political claims to one's collective interests, but also the transformation of subjectivity that is the hopeful ideal of collective organization.[101] The actions of the Black soldiers at Fort Hood were effectively a strike: "the most important single act of a group of soldiers since the Vietnam war began," in Stapp's view.[102] Stapp identified a racialized international working class divided by not only an international division of labour and nationalism, race and imperialism, but also the specific division of some of these people into the actual lethality confronting the other, comparable to the Dutch soldiers who didn't want to be in the position of fighting the PFLP. His articulation speaks to a longstanding understanding of the international working class that we see all over the Marxist tradition, as well as in Black radical thought.[103] The soldier in the standing army was: "an instrument with which the capitalist state can

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[99] Fifth Estate Collective, "American Servicemen's Union."

[100] At a 1969 ASU event in Washington state, "a representative from the United Farm Workers, Dale Van Pelt, spoke at length about the national grape boycott, comparing poor agricultural laborers to the exploited "grunts" of a working-class army and proposing that a union model of labor organization, like that being built by the American Servicemen's Union, could help ameliorate these shared injustices." Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds*, 79. United Farm Workers President Chavez's visit to Berlin was also advertised in G.I. newspapers in the 1970s. "How's It Growing? Forward No. 27." GI Press Collection, 1964-1977, 3-4.

[101] Lebowitz, *Socialist Imperative*; There is empirical work arguing that there is an inverse relationship between union membership and racism: Paul Frymer and Jacob M. Grumbach, "Labor Unions and White Racial Politics," *American Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 1 (2021): 225–40.

[102] Fifth Estate Collective, "American Servicemen's Union."

[103] See: Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (University of California Press, 2013).; Charisse Burden-Stelly and Jodi Dean, ed. *Organize, Fight, Win: Black Communist Women's Political Writing* (Verso, 2022).; Roderick D. Bush, *The End of White World Supremacy: Black Internationalism and the Problem of the Color Line* (Temple University Press, 2009).; W.E.B. Du Bois, "The African Roots of War (1915)," in *W. E. B. Du Bois: International Thought*, ed. Adom Getachew and Jennifer Pitts (Cambridge

contain, and if necessary suppress bloodily, any move he makes to improve his situation"[104] in Luxemburg's description – the Fort Hood 43 rejected exactly this instrumentalization and withdrew their labour.

Through the 1960s and early 1970s, soldier activism grew alongside the anti-war movement and the proliferation of the New Left. In Europe, where around 250,000 U.S. soldiers were stationed at a time, political newspapers, ideas, and organization circled in and out of bases and across borders. The soldiers of the Dutch "hair" army led a cross-national "hair resistance" movement that put a New Left stamp on labour organizing and class consciousness. 1974 was the height of the haircut resistance in the U.S. army in Europe, with numerous resistors, courts-martials, punishments, galvanizing U.S. and European soldiers. Amusing superficially, the hair struggle managed to connect numerous complaints that connected the labour process, anti-racism, socializing and identity, and cultural change.

In West Germany, the "Berlin Brothers" hair resisters captured the imagination and organizational focus of the moment. "The Army's trying to treat us like criminals for growing our hair," a soldier protesting the hair regulations was quoted as saying in a press release in the U.S. G.I. newspaper *Forward*, published out of West Berlin. "We aren't criminals, we're simply standing up for our rights."[105] The harsh punishments handed down by the military justice system, such as rank demotion, courts-martial, hard labour, and prison time, contrasted with the violation's apparent innocence. The same soldier continued, "Usually it's minorities in America that have had to fight for their rights, but we're a majority. Without us enlisted people doing the work, the Army wouldn't function. So why shouldn't we at least have the right to decide whether or not long hair interferes with that work."[106] The army's presentation of the violation as an interference *with work*,

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University Press, 2022), 22–35.; Richard B. Moore, W. Burghardt Turner, and Joyce Moore Turner, *Richard B. Moore, Caribbean Militant in Harlem: Collected Writings, 1920-1972* (Indiana University Press, 1992).; Michael O. West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins, eds., *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

[104] Luxemburg, *Militia and Militarism*.

[105] "Forward Hair Resistance Press Releases 1974." See also: Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*, 29-31.

[106] "Forward Hair Resistance Press Releases 1974."

implied that hair style and length – not a part of the labour process – could affect the outcome of the labour process, military capacity, and therefore the foreign policy of the United States. The arbitrariness of uniform and the severity of punishment were a doubly irrational disciplinary configuration that highlighted the conflict over the ownership of body and labour.

When the only Black hair resistor, Rufus Thompson, was singled out for punishment, other soldiers in Berlin went on strike. The soldiers identified this as a "racist tactic" to keep the hair resistance an all-white movement, and cut off Thompson from group support: they dropped the charges against only him so that they could remove him from Berlin and the movement in Germany where he might inspire more Black soldiers.[107] Soldiers stopped work and published demands, including to elect representatives for a race relations council and more, explicitly using the language of the strike: "twenty-seven Black, White and Chicano soldiers of C Battery 94th Artillery, Berlin Brigade went on strike in solidarity with Black haircut resistor Rufus Thompson and in protest against steadily worsening working and living conditions in their battery."[108] When Louis M. Stokes, also stationed in American West Germany, was court-martialed for refusing to comply with U.S. Army haircut regulations, Dutch soldiers also rallied in solidarity. They presented Stokes with 400 signed petitions of Dutch soldiers in support and three gave expert testimony for him, describing the success of Dutch hair reforms to the judge – to no legal avail.

The hair issue represented, among other things, the political implications of the uniform and the social division of labour. One newspaper described the haircut as a barrier to integrating into Berlin; soldiers wanted to make friends and meet people, and the army haircut reinforced the separation and, for Berliners, reinforced the view of Americans as an occupying force long-standing since the end of World War II.[109] These soldiers understood soldiering as their job and wanted a life outside of it: in this way, hair was a significant representation of a consciousness as

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[107] "Forward Hair Resistance Press Releases 1974," 1-2.

[108] "Forward Hair Resistance Press Releases 1974," 1-2.

[109] Military occupation officially ended in the 1950s, but the American sector of West Berlin remained under military occupation until 1990, so in the 1970's this was not merely an issue of historical memory for Berliners.

workers. “It’s like wearing your uniform 24 hours a day,” one wrote in the *Forward*.[110] They wanted to clock out at the end of the day. One newspaper connected this to the widespread drug abuse among soldiers: unable to live their lives in the city due to “the language barrier and hair-cut barrier”, soldiers retreated to the barracks, depressed, with only drugs and alcohol as entertainment.[111] In another, more focused political analysis, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War paper described the separation as follows: “For the military, keeping GIs divided from the people of the countries they are stationed in is vitally important. … It’s really there to live off of the people and not with them.”[112] This article aimed to analyze the role of red-light districts and bars off-base, as facilitating sexism and racism and thereby U.S. domination, but we can see haircuts as another method of facilitating this separation and how politicized soldiers would interpret it as such.

As with the Fort Hood 43, the Berlin Brothers and the hair resistance represented the convergence of old and New Left. Most definitely concerned with racism, personal dignity and freedoms, and changing generational expectations, the political response of these soldiers was to withdraw their labour and to organize in their workplace, to not only interrupt the labour process but to demand the ability to exert ownership over it. The civil rights movement, the New Left, and the antiwar movement, all conspired to build up the consciousness and skills of the soldiers. They used their power to assert sovereignty over their own bodies, labour, and the products thereof.

5.3.2 The call is coming from inside the house: The American Federation of Government Employees and the Union that Wasn’t

The ASU’s radicalism could not be further away from the next acronym to make U.S. military unionism an issue. *The Wall Street Journal* broke the news on 27 June 1975 that the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) was considering a plan to unionize the military. According to president Clyde M. Webber, the AFGE was only at an initial stage of studying the possibility of taking members of the uniformed services. The reporting in June caused enough of

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[110] “How’s It Growing? Forward No. 27.”

[111] “How’s It Growing? Forward No. 27.”

[112] “Bar-women” in “GI News.” Vietnam Veterans Against the War/ Winter Soldier Organization, December 1, 1974.

a stir in the military and government, however, that in fewer than two months, on August 18th, Webber was giving testimony before the Defense Manpower Commission.

Rather than political agitation, the AFGE had identified a mutual interest between their existing members, civilian employees of the federal government, and uniformed military personnel, one in which the location of power of military members might be able to exercise sway over the employer, the government. Only two years after the U.S. military became the All-Volunteer Force (July 1, 1973), the issue came up during a recession, and a time of reorganization both institutional and ideological, and soldiers feared losing congressional cuts to their benefits. The cuts were discussed and debated but never actually materialized; nonetheless, career personnel felt so vulnerable that their support for unionization, however ambivalent, ended up shaping the state of public sector unionism and military budget ever since.[113] These and other compensation issues had already been identified by military reports as personnel issues. A report in early 1975 of navy personnel, identified dissatisfaction "from constant changes in 'people programs' and violations of enlistment contracts," and "unrest over constant changes is running so high that the idea of unionization of military personnel came up frequently."[114] It is possible that the years of struggle had ideologically prepared soldiers to be largely open to the possibility of unionizing.

Oppositional arguments of the time reveal both intra- and inter-organizational interests and concerns – with varying degrees of pettiness and significance – around budgets, recruitment, manpower, civilian control, chain of command, order and discipline, moral as well as military-political concerns about the U.S.'s military capacities, and existential alarm. Statements often reference small-scale issues – such as "civilianizing military billets" – in the same paragraph as

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[113] Mittelstadt, "The Army is a Service, Not a Job."; *Rise of the Military Welfare State*.

[114] Phil Stevens, "Navy People are 'disillusioned'—That's What Defense Manpower Panel Found in San Diego Study," *Navy Times*, 5 March 1975 cited in Krendel et al., *Unionizing the Armed Forces*, 2-3. (Not available on *Navy Times* online.)

"People program" is a vague term that can encompass a range of management concerns regarding personnel, such as welfare programs, recruitment and retention, etc.

identifying the stakes of the debate as "national existence".[115] Considering the non-radical, pay and administrative grievances that topped the list of the AFGE's objectives, the opposition can appear hysterical. Mittelstadt argues that the debate turned on long-standing American ideologies around the public sector, with the racial-classed connotations thereof.[116]

A significant part of the debate in the U.S. was over the very conceptualization of soldiers' work. This was a matter of concern already in debates over how the all-volunteer force would recruit, retain, and otherwise organize military labour. The possibility that soldiers would see themselves as employees and therefore seek improved workplace conditions and rights of civilian workplaces,[117] was troubling for politicians, military leaders, and academics. Leading figure of military sociology Charles Moskos was emblematic of such voices who saw the issue as one of values: individual self-interest – including in the form of trade unionism – replacing conservative organizational authority and priority. Moskos' "occupationalization thesis" took hold of politicians in the union debates and became "common wisdom" "practically overnight."[118] He argued that the volunteer army challenged the "vocational" sentiment of the career-soldiers, and "the emphasis on recruiting soldiers based on their consumer desires" (the money-mediation of social reproduction and underlying expropriated condition of proletarians) "or their hope for upward mobility presented a new model of military as occupation."[119] While these descriptions seem like innocuous descriptions of reality, academics, military leaders, politicians, and soldiers seemed to genuinely believe that an overlying ideal could transubstantiate the labour-power of the institution into

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[115] AUSA, "50 Years Without the Draft: Behind the Bold Move That Ended Conscription, and What's Next for the All-Volunteer Force," June 21, 2023.; David F. Eisler, "A Brief History of Military-to-Civilian Conversions in the Department of Defense, 1965–2015," (Institute for Defense Analysis, March 2017).

[116] Mittelstadt, "The Army is a Service, Not a Job." Public intellectuals and journalists of the time connected the question to long-running conservative discourses of military manpower planning conspiracy-adjacent views of "socialism" inherent to "collectivism" of the concept of public planning. Irving Louis Horowitz. "Human Resources and Military Manpower Requirements," *Armed Forces & Society* 12, no. 2 (1986): 173–92.

[117] Heinecken, *Military unionism in the post Cold War era*, 2.

[118] Mittelstadt, "The Army is a Service, Not a Job," 38.

[119] Mittelstadt, "The Army is a Service, Not a Job," 38. This is an enduring part of military ideology; February 2025 interview with a transgender Naval officer affected by the Trump administration executive orders articulated precisely service as "more than a job." Christina Cauterucci, "A Naval Officer and Counsel for Lambda Legal Speak Out Against Trump's Ban," *Outward: Slate's LBGTQ Podcast*. Accessed February 13, 2025.

something 'higher' than the reality of the money-mediating meeting of subsistence and cultural needs.[120]

Repression of AFGE unionization mostly took on the form of discourse, because there was in fact minimal organizing to suppress,[121] compared with the anti-war activities of the ASU. Politicians debated, army newspapers covered news events and published varying points of view. This political firestorm that was unleashed certainly did not encourage the AFGE's tentative, already compromised campaign for extending membership to uniformed personnel. By the end of the union debate of the 1970s, military benefits would be raised and safeguarded to a vaunted new position.

The Vietnam years had perhaps prepared the way, demonstrating to the government the advantages of co-optation and top-down reforms for quelling political dissent and organizational challenges like unionization. Top-down reform is not won through class struggle, but implemented from above, cutting off at the root the pedagogical role that the struggle for reforms has served in the labour, socialist, and revolutionary movements.[122] The process of struggling to achieve even modest reforms builds the skills of how to do politics with others, and educate on the limits of the system, the antagonism of the employer and/or government. One example from 1969 is the 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Fort Carson (Colorado); a report identified that the division "suffered" from all the big issues of the time: "high personnel turnover, crime, absences, drug abuse, and racial conflict. [Dropping] Discipline, morale, and combat readiness."[123] Traditional methods of investigating, punishing, isolating, and eliminating "troublemakers" and instilling "soldier pride and unit esprit" through vigorous training and discipline were unsuccessful the

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[120] Rob Hunter, "Marx's Critique and the Constitution of the Capitalist State," in *Research Handbook on Law and Marxism*, ed. Paul O'Connell and Umut Özsu (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), 190–208.

[121] This does not imply that the idea of unionizing was unpopular. One-third and one-half of personnel were in favour according to some data. Mittelstadt, "The Army is a Service, Not a Job," 29.

[122] Luxemburg, "Reform and Revolution." Gourevitch, "Themselves Must Strike the Blow."

[123] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 65. Emphasis mine.

"draftees and Vietnam returnees with *little commitment to the service*".[124] Maj. Gen. Bernard Rogers became commander and took a new approach: he "*chose to co-opt* them."

> He established an Enlisted Man's Council. Junior enlisted soldiers (grade E-4 and below) elected company representatives who met regularly with their battalion commander. [...] The council brought the views, complaints, and suggestions of the lowest ranks - who constituted the largest number of soldiers at Fort Carson - directly to Rogers' attention, unfiltered by layers of intervening command levels.[125]

This method allowed soldiers to feel recognized and to express their own ideas and solutions for improving living and working conditions, 70 percent of which he instituted:

> He ended Saturday morning inspection and daily reveille and retreat formations. Soldiers received permission to partition their barracks and decorate them to taste. Bright colors, black lights, and psychedelic posters blossomed. Enlisted clubs on post took on the appearances of coffee houses, and officers were encouraged to drop in and "rap" with the men.

Replicating and co-opting the coffee houses – the hubs of much GI activism in the period, including ASU organizing – was a deliberate aim of Project Volunteer Army (VOLAR) experiments[126], including at Fort Carson, where nearby Colorado Springs was by 1971 home to "one of the most popular antiwar GI coffeehouses in the country".[127]

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[124] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 65. Emphasis mine.

[125] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 65. Emphasis mine.

[126] The transition to the volunteer armed force began in 1969 with President Nixon. Project Volunteer Army (VOLAR) was a series of experiments conducted in 1971 sponsored by the U.S. Army's Special Assistant for the Modern Volunteer Army (SAMVA), and its objectives and findings reflected the issues of quality of military life and professional standards as the main path forward. William E. Datel, "Final Evaluation Report on Fort Ord Project VOLAR." Washington, D.C.: Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, 1978.; Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds*, 89.

[127] "When Jane Fonda visited the post with a group of antiwar activists in 1971, local GIs gave them a grand tour of the new VOLAR-improved facilities, including Fort Carson's own psychedelic—but not antiwar—GI coffeehouse, the Inscape. As Fonda later recalled, she and many of the Carson soldiers with whom she spoke agreed that the Inscape had been created "to keep the men from coming to the GI movement coffeehouse." The Inscape's walls were adorned with posters of pinup girls and advertisements for "girlie shows" featuring Playboy playmates. On the pages of Life magazine, photos of the army's coffeehouse depict a large crowd of soldiers sipping drinks at small tables, most of them staring up at a pair of bikini-clad go-go dancers shaking their hips on stage. With the army unrolling flashy attempts to win the hearts and minds of its soldiers, GI and civilian organizers recognized the need to adapt their movement to the VOLAR program and the wider set of policy changes initiated by Nixon's administration." Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds*, 90. Contrast this to the anti-war coffeehouses, covered with posters of – for example at Fort Lewis in Washington state – "Allen Ginsberg, Muhammad Ali, Che Guevara, and even Charlie Chaplin". Parsons, *Dangerous Grounds*, 36.

> Within ten months reenlistments at Fort Carson increased 45 percent, absences and criminal activities declined, and morale among junior enlisted soldiers went up. Rogers said the new system merely forced the Army to "give a damn about the soldier." Col. David Hughes, Rogers' chief of staff, concluded that the approach worked because "when mistrustful soldiers saw that their complaints and suggestions actually got a hearing, and they got an answer, they began to trust." Furthermore, a sense of reciprocity developed. As the soldiers received more discretion over their daily affairs, they accepted the responsibility of self-discipline. Peer pressure often brought into line soldiers who deviated from the new standards and abused newly won privileges.[128]

The council and many of these other army-directed experiments were "decried" by "traditionalists"; they believed, " the council undermined authority," and they "predicted disintegration of the chain of command", even though "[n]othing of the sort happened."[129] Others attempted to generalize the councils, proposing enlisted soldiers' councils being instituted across the army; "The assistant chief of staff for force development considered the proposal tantamount to creating a union."[130] The Army Chief of Staff's representative, Lt. Col. John Seigle, on a visit to Fort Carson in November 1971 concluded that such "so-called life-style improvements," were neither "revolutionary or startling."[131] On the council idea specifically, he "noted that it was '*at least as useful to the commanders* as it is to the junior soldiers.' He found no evidence that the enlisted men's councils circumvented the chain of command."[132] Indeed, it was highly successful at reinforcing the chain of command and stifling some of the class consciousness and activist impetus.

The end of the Vietnam War and the end of the draft, achievements in many ways of the broader movements that soldier unionists were a part of, paradoxically gave a blow to the movements. A smaller, volunteer army selects for people more inclined to or committed to the institution's purpose and the kind of career entailed – indeed they are more inclined to see it as a professional *career*.[133] It also means that there are fewer people in total and as a percentage of the population

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[128] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 65.

[129] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 65.

[130] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 71.

[131] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 102.

[132] Griffith, "U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force," 102.

[133] Cortright and Watts, *Left Face*.

who are soldiers. While many military unions endure to this day, even in slimmed-down volunteer armies, they are largely associational in type, rather than political, and the range of structures and political freedoms they have vary by country. Both in this New Left period, and into the post-Cold War period, "there appears to be no blueprint for military unionism and a mosaic of representative structures has emerged."[134] In Europe, many achieved significant reforms to the pay and conditions of military service. Others still played significant roles in preventing fascist and neo-nazi coup attempts. In Portugal, the union of officers played a key role in the end of the dictatorship.[135] In Scandinavian countries they were incorporated or co-opted into the armed forces structure. A present-day best practices factsheet from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on human rights and military unions identifies both "the freedom to join professional bodies and trade unions" as a fundamental right and recognizes legitimate reasons states limit it: "Associations that focus on the social and professional aspects of military life – as opposed to operational and strategic issues – have been found to have no discernible impact on operational effectiveness in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden."[136] Ultimately, professional associations predominated over public sector unions, and they did not become the civil-military relations nightmares or existential threats that their detractors expected at the height of the anti-war movement. Military unionism does not have a singular meaning, and it is not obvious what it would have meant to have had a formally recognized union succeeded in unionizing uniformed personnel in the U.S.; indeed, associational organizations do exist in the U.S. today, such as the Association of the United States Army.[137]

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[134] Heinecken, *Military unionism in the post Cold War era*, 3.

[135] See, for example: Raquel Varela, *A People's History of the Portuguese Revolution* (Pluto Press, 2019).

[136] "Human Rights of Armed Forces Personnel: Compendium of Standards, Good Practices and Recommendations," Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance. Accessed April 15, 2025.

[137] 10 U.S. Code § 976(g): "Nothing in this section shall limit the right of any member of the armed forces— (1)to join or maintain membership in any organization or association not constituting a "military labor organization" as defined in subsection (a)(2) of this section." LII / Legal Information Institute. "10 U.S. Code § 976 - Membership in Military Unions, Organizing of Military Unions, and Recognition of Military Unions Prohibited." Accessed April 22, 2025.

The most significant form of repression in the U.S. came in 1978 in the form of prohibition of unionization of the armed forces under section 976 of U.S. Code Title 10.[138] This is the greatest contrast to the European environment and of course to international human rights law.[139] When the AFGE union drive was dead, bills banning military unions were still making their way through Congress. As Mittelstadt argues, the symbol of "the union had become a useful political tool"[140] with which long-time anti-union political actors could both degrade the labour movement (and public sector unions in particular) in total by setting them up as a foil against the military: lazy, greedy, and undisciplined versus heroic, disciplined, self-sacrificing, and noble. The hysterics surrounding the threat of unionism did not reflect the seriousness of the threat from the AFGE, but rather the opportunity to strike a blow against organized labour and the typical targets (Black and Southern workers, public sector workers, women, "big government") and to afford the military "unique consideration in the matter of benefits and the federal budget" in a time of recession.[141] The minor shift, proposed in the AFGE's hypothetical military union membership extension, in authority over matters of pay, benefits, and other issues not related to either labour process control, worker autonomy, let alone social movement unionism or something more radical, was too much for the U.S. military leadership and government.

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[138] 10 U.S. Code § 976 (a)(2): "The term "military labor organization" means any organization that engages in or attempts to engage in—(A) negotiating or bargaining with any civilian officer or employee, or with any member of the armed forces, on behalf of members of the armed forces, concerning the terms or conditions of military service of such members in the armed forces; (B) representing individual members of the armed forces before any civilian officer or employee, or any member of the armed forces, in connection with any grievance or complaint of any such member arising out of the terms or conditions of military service of such member in the armed forces; or (C) striking, picketing, marching, demonstrating, or any other similar form of concerted action which is directed against the Government of the United States and which is intended to induce any civilian officer or employee, or any member of the armed forces, to—(i) negotiate or bargain with any person concerning the terms or conditions of military service of any member of the armed forces, (ii) recognize any organization as a representative of individual members of the armed forces in connection with complaints and grievances of such members arising out of the terms or conditions of military service of such members in the armed forces, or (iii) make any change with respect to the terms or conditions of military service of individual members of the armed forces."

[139] Jakub Gołaś, "Military Unionism from the Perspective of International Law: Between National Security and Freedom of Association," *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations* 38, no. 3 (September 1, 2022).

[140] Mittelstadt, "The Army is a Service, Not a Job," 44.

[141] Mittelstadt, "The Army is a Service, Not a Job," 44

5.4 The Struggle over Cooperative Labour and its Political Potentialities

> Just as the offensive power of a squadron of cavalry, or the defensive power of an infantry regiment, is essentially different from the sum of the offensive or defensive powers of the individual soldiers taken separately, so the sum total of the mechanical forces exerted by isolated workers differs from the social force that is developed when many hands cooperate in the same undivided operation, such as raising a heavy weight, turning a winch or getting an obstacle out of the way.[142]

As Marx identified in *Capital*, cooperation, combined conscious activity of multiple people toward a shared end, is a key part of any concentrated mass labour process, military labour processes included. The magnitude of potential power of a mass of organized, armed people working cooperatively opens up qualitatively new possibilities of political purposes with world historic implications: the 18th- and 19th-century land wars of Europe epitomize this in our imaginaries. This immense potential power also includes rebellious politics inverting the authority over labour by mutiny or to revolt: "As the number of [cooperating] workers increases, so too does their resistance to the domination of capital, and, necessarily, the pressure put on by capital to overcome this resistance."[143] Due to the power it generates, it is a potential hazard and may be decreased and substituted by machinery where possible.[144] Since cooperation as a feature of the labour process always has specific historical content of the social relations that shape it, it is subject to management's dis- and re-assembly. Part of the process of controlling it can include mystification.

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[142] Marx, *Capital*, 443.

[143] Marx, *Capital*, 449.

[144] For example, the increased use of sensors in the U.S. Army in the 21st century means that a single soldier with sensors can relay information from a great distance automatically without communicating through his own conscious language with others. Post-Cold War, the U.S. and other militaries of rich countries have been substituting technology for cooperative manpower; whether this is affecting the types of military engagements or vice versa is a matter of debate, but it is also clear that this coincides with engagements that are orientated less towards on-the-ground commitments and more to special operations, surveillance, and aerial 'precision targeting' (assassination) which are subject to less popular scrutiny than definitive ground wars relying on the Army (i.e. Vietnam War). Also see: Shafer, "Rifle Theory"; Resnikoff, "Technology Trap"; *Labor's End*.

That the labour process is a site of class struggle and conflict is a key insight that Marx provides.[145] It brings into focus the struggle that can take place within the labour process itself: action by workers to improve their lot (identifying problems and solutions and claiming workers' power over *how* work is done) and management actions to increase value-extraction or to increase their own control or "rights" over it (in the cases above, suppression and courts-martial, co-optation and top-down reforms, or restricting rights of association). Even something as seemingly innocuous as hair regulations can therefore be an important battle over "management rights." Without keeping labour process class struggle in view, one may view *outcomes* of the struggle – such as high or low wages and labour peace – as *inherent* to a workforce segment or type of worker. As outlined above, the ideological valorization of soldiers in the U.S. at the expense of other public sector workers is an outcome in part of a historical moment, as Mittelstadt argues.[146] Without this struggle in view, we run the risk of essentialism, where we view political hierarchies, alliances, and social differences among the working classes as stable rather than historically specific phenomena with determinate relations to class processes to explain.[147]

Marx sought to describe how in the development of modern industrial capitalism, craft-workers were de-skilled and proletarianized in the course of class struggle; that is, their ability to exercise judgment and authority over their own labor-power and its product was eliminated. After Marx, Harry Braverman published the next significant work to take the labour process itself as a site of class conflict. This was an alternative to the common approach to see the control and organization of the workplace and production as a technical exercise. Braverman shows that historical developments like Fordism, Taylorism, automation, and scientific management, were events in class struggle: a way to deskill workers and thereby lower wages and subordinate workers, making them more disposable and disciplinable. Technologies and management techniques are tools to strip away skilled parts of labour, separating the conception and arrangement of work from its

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[145] For a summary see: William Lazonick, "Labour Process," in *Marxian Economics*, ed. John Eatwell, Murray Milgate, and Peter Newman (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1990), 225–32. See also: David Knights, ed., *Labour Process Theory* (Macmillan, 1990).

[146] Mittelstadt, "The Army is a Service, Not a Job."

[147] Gabriel Winant, "The Baby and the Bathwater: Class Analysis and Class Formation after Deindustrialisation," *Historical Materialism*, October 1, 2024, 1–28.

execution, reappropriating skilled parts for managers or machines, or merely fragmenting them and reassigning the deskilled components between workers. I have argued in this dissertation that class struggle takes place within and shapes the state; class struggle is present in military labour – the challenge is to politicize around it.

5.4.1 Labour process reorganization and deskilling

In labour process theory, deskilling refers to management's efforts to control workers and lower costs through divisions and mechanization, particularly through dividing processes into smaller, simpler tasks performed by many workers rather than one skilled craftsman.[148] The labour-political effects are multiple and contradictory. First is a matter of authority, as labour is directed and planned not by the worker themself but by others (often managers); second is a matter of experience, as the tasks become less creative, interesting, and complex; third is a matter of skill, as fragmenting the labour process into ever-simpler and more isolated tasks can reduce the skill level required to carry out that work. Greater skill, by supply-and-demand logic, implies more unique and therefore greater power of the skilled worker.

De-skilling undermines both the manual ability of creation and inseparably, the intellectual abilities of creation. A craftsperson who makes an object from start to finish – refining materials, weaving fabric, designing a pattern, cutting the fabric, constructing a garment, decorating a garment – has high physical ability as well as knowledge of how that object is produced. De-skilling disperses all these activities – in globalized supply chains characterized by labour arbitrage, across the world – and with it the knowledge of production held by the worker(s). Importantly, there is no perfected endpoint; labour is constantly subjected to reorganization and deskilling due to the dynamic nature of capitalist production. This initial deskilling is also what turns the solitary craftsman into a cooperative worker. Marx terms this the socialization of production because skill and knowledge are contained not in the individual worker but in the

[148] See: Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*; Alex Levant and Clarice Kuhling, "Political Deskilling/Reskilling: Flying Squads and the Crisis of Workers' Self-Organization," in *Sociology for Changing the World: Social Movements/Social Research* (Fernwood, 2006).

collective worker; at the same time, socialization is undertaken through exploitation for the object of value production.

The broad tendency of deskilling has shaped workers' organization, not least of all because skill is determined by cultural historical standards. As Denning writes, "the definition of skill is a cultural product," and for this reason, "workers have continually fought over the classifications of particular jobs."[149] Craft unions and industrial unions represent different philosophies of work and politics. Industrial unions organize workers across an industry, incorporating workers from all different occupations, skill levels, and positions into one union. This has strategic advantages, such as greater unified power counterbalances against the employer, but it also carries an implicit theory of work with normative implications: all these workers have a shared interest, can identify with one another, and leverage to hold even greater combined power over their employers. Conversely, craft unionism organizes workers by craft or occupation. Craft unions preceded industrial unions historically, emerging in a period after craft guilds had been weakened and craftspeople had been effectively de-skilled by industrialization. Often they sought to maintain their skilled work and its status of respect and authority, facing the imminent threat to both. So while the tendency to deskill is to diminish the differentiation between all workers, it is not an automatic nor even prevalent response among workers to therefore identify with one another by connected subjugation. In fact, in the face of deskilling, workers have historically sought to *enforce* differentiation and hierarchy to maintain their individual position in a class structure that is constantly recomposed by capital's needs for control and accumulation. As Denning writes, "The central dynamic of working class life under capitalism is neither a secular trend toward homogenization, nor an infinite proliferation of differences, but the dialectic between, to use Marx's words, competition and association".[150]

Of industrial de-skilling, Braverman writes, "The capitalist mode of production systematically destroys all-around skills where they exist, and brings into being skills and occupations that

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[149] Denning, "Representing Global Labor," 135.

[150] Denning, "Representing Global Labor," 144.

correspond to its needs".[151] We can see the same phenomenon in military labour.[152] We do not typically appreciate that military change and development are labour stories, but instead focus on technology or organization. As demonstrated by the cases in the chapter the politics of labour impact the course of military organization and its uses: a politicized and organized military population affected the Netherlands' middle east foreign policy; anti-union conservative movements fundamentally shaped the new volunteer force in the U.S. The dynamics of capitalist society produce not only changes in those political antagonisms and alliances and technologies that shape and are shaped by militaries, but classes from which military labour is drawn are also in constant processes of flux: "The proletariat has always been many things concretely, even as it is unitary in a more abstract sense."[153] In the process, certain skills are encouraged and others discouraged.

In general, this military labour shift diminishes the skills of mass cooperative labour through elimination and increasing the skills of management. Part of the difference here is accounted for by the unproductivity of the military workplace and the content of its role in society: political power. Military leadership is not governing the organization for the maximization of surplus value. Authority, the first dimension of deskilling of the labour process that I mentioned, is absolutely essential to military organization. Authority is achieved throughout the organization in a completely different way than in production: capitalist production is premised on free and equally contracting individuals, obscuring the authoritarian nature of production,[154] whereas the military

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[151] Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 82

[152] One specific example is the task of performing "calculations to convert radar ranges and angles into grid coordinates and altitudes" which in World War II were performed by the Women's Auxiliary Air Force "manually on paper and a plotting board." As Lindsay describes, "This tedious cognitive task was eventually simplified by the introduction of a purpose-built tabulating device and automated plotting table called "the fruit machine." OR scientists later connected radar console and fruit machine outputs directly to teletype printers in the Filter Room. Humans thus offloaded data-processing tasks onto electromechanical machines, but only after they were able to formally define their tasks as discrete operations." Hence there is a deskilling from manually performed mathematics to programming and maintaining calculating-machines. Lindsay 2020, 88.

[153] Winant, "The Baby and the Bathwater," 4.

[154] However, exceptional authoritarianism in production has been a motivating factor in labour history. In the U.S., for example: "[...]when the industrial uprising finally began in 1933 it was not primarily concerned with wages or even working hours. Indeed, the underlying thrust was surprisingly non-economistic; in a majority of cases the fundamental grievance was the *petty despotism* of the workplace incarnated in the *capricious power* of the foremen

is explicitly premised on hierarchy of authority over the planning, direction, and organization of the labour process.

5.4.1.1 Political deskilling

In the case of the military, what are the equivalent to the all-around skills of the craftsman disassembled and deskilled? The military was the example of hierarchy and division of labour that was invoked to describe the new phenomena of capitalist development, after all.[155] The all-around skills are that of violent power over political life, but they have always been divided between classes and eventually appropriated by the state form, as described in chapter three. Political life requires the collective and interdependent labours of many, but in class society, the state form stands above and apart from society and is the object of struggle. Soldiering therefore represents a key node by which political labour is appropriated to the capitalist state; furthermore and because of this, the ends of those labours are for the reproduction of the political powers of the ruling class. In capitalist society, this ongoing process is mediated by value: proletarians rather than peasants fill the lower ranks of the military, and the exchange is for the reproduction of life (through room and board or wages) rather than feudal system of personal obligation.

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and the inhuman pressures of mechanized production lines. It must be recalled that in 1933 the typical American factory was a *miniature feudal state* where streamlined technologies were combined with a *naked brutality that was the envy of fascist labour ministers*. In Ford's immense citadels at Dearborn and River Rouge, for example, security chief Harry Bennett's 'servicemen' openly *terrorized and beat* assembly workers for such transgressions of plant rules as talking to one another on the line. In the huge Goodyear complex at Akron the majority of workers were pitted against *a paramilitary 'flying squad'* of company favourites and stoolpigeons. But the most totalitarian settings were undoubtedly the grim steel towns of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Indiana—the 'little Siberias' of Aliquippa, Weirton, Steelton, Duquesne, and so on—where steel barons like Tom Girdler or Benjamin Fairless exercised *untrammeled local dictatorships*. As Mayor Crawford of Duquesne once put it, 'Jesus Christ couldn't speak in Duquesne for the American Federation of Labour.' Thus it is not surprising that the deepest impulse of the early industrial strikes was the fight for democratization at the workplace and civil liberties in company towns." Mike Davis, "The Barren Marriage of American Labour and the Democratic Party," *New Left Review*, no. I/124 (December 1, 1980): 43–84. Emphasis mine.

[155] See above footnote also. "The task of controlling this power is again an opportunity for Marx to draw a military comparison: 'That a capitalist should command in the field of production is now as indispensable as that a general should command on the field of battle' (Marx 1981, 448). He elaborates on the various roles subordinate to command: 'An industrial army of workers under the command of a capitalist requires, like a real army, officers (managers) and NCOs (foremen, overseers), who command during the labour process in the name of capital' (Marx 1981, 450)." Jasmine Chorley-Schulz, "Soldiers and the State in Marx and Engels," in *Marxism and the Capitalist State: Towards a New Debate*, ed. Rob Hunter, Rafael Khachaturian, and Eva Nanopoulos (Springer International Publishing, 2023), 121–39.

Military labour is ultimately, I argue, labour of doing a certain type of politics. In the service of the capitalist state, this is the labour of pacifying and dominating whole groups of people and their geographies; suppressing people's resistance and recovery of their land, possessions, and social relations; stealing or destroying animals, crops, soil, and water (the means of subsistence and economy); disciplining the labour of others into new subjects; performing punishment to intimidate and propagandize;[156] and to any number of ends, killing *other* people performing military labour for your state-cum-employer's rivals.[157] These concrete acts with politically-specific objectives are, in the abstract, modes of exercising political power. Military labour is already politically deskilled by definition through the hierarchy and social division of labour of capitalist society writ large, or, as Lenin phrased it, "the splitting of society into irreconcilably hostile classes."[158] Without adopting Lenin's account of the origins of the state wholesale, the standing army is the removal or alienation of a particular form of political activity from people and/or specific ruling classes to the state, the political form of capitalist social relations, and it represents the disarming of the oppressed classes as such, with some of the people of the oppressed class remanded for the service of the state as soldiers. Like the rest of the state, the power of governance writ large is appropriated in such a fashion; it has historically been expanded so that the capitalist state develops specific needs and functions that are not the qualities of social life writ large. The result is not only political domination but political deskilling of the working classes. Soldiers, as workers, do not have the ability to control the political ends toward which their labour is put; as citizens or as proletarians foreign policy is ever-removed from democratic exercise of

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[156] I want to name this to avoid presenting a picture of violence as always straightforwardly utilitarian. On violence's rhetorical powers see: Yves Winter, "Violence and Visibility," *New Political Science* 34, no. 2 (2012): 195–202.

[157] Julie Greene, "Builders of Empire: Rewriting the Labor and Working-Class History of Anglo-American Global Power," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 13, no. 3 (November 13, 2016): 1–10.

[158] Lenin, *State and Revolution*, 10-11. "A standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power. But can it be otherwise? [...] To question why the need arose for special bodies of armed men, placed above society and alienating themselves from society (police, standing army), the west European and Russian philistines are inclined to reply with a few phrases borrowed from Spencer or Mikailovski referring to the growing complexity of social life, the differentiation of functions, etc. Such references seem scientific, and wondrously belittle the man in the street by obscuring the main and basic fact; the splitting of society into irreconcilably hostile classes."

power; as both, and their capacities for collective action - political action for themselves - are restricted and therefore diminished, as the militia advocates argued.

In labour studies, political deskilling is "the weakening of workers' capacity for collective self-activity" in the context of industrial relations.[159] This idea is typically used as an analogue to the labour process deskilling discussed above and is a historical process whereby workers and oppressed people lose the skills of political power and action cultivated by the labour movement: how to strike, organize, deliberate, theorize, etc. This framework is useful because it conceives of politics as not only institutional (labour unions, parties, militaries, militia, etc.) but also emphasizes that it is built up and is a learned set of knowledge and capacities.[160] Of the political activity of the labour movement in the post-war period, Alex Levant and Clarice Kuhling write, "As power increasingly shifted from workers to bureaucrats, the agents of workplace struggle ceased to be workers and instead became bureaucrats and professionals. The self-activity of workers was transformed into the activity of others. This transformation is part of the process of political de-skilling."[161] They draw the connection between political deskilling, and other parts of fragmentation and inter-worker competition, to "the crisis of working-class consciousness/self-organization" in organized labour.[162] By institutionalizing in a particular way the class struggle in union bureaucracy, workers' own political abilities begin to atrophy: just as one's mathematics skills may atrophy when replaced by computing machines.[163]

As Marx identified in his critique of alienation, capitalism's organization of activity – especially via the wage relation – not only cuts off our *access* to self-managing our production and society generally, it undermines our *abilities* to do so. "What workers are surrendering is their capacity to

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[159] Levant and Kuhling, "Political Deskilling/Reskilling." I want to acknowledge both Kate Jacobson and Phil Henderson for independently bringing this concept to my attention and suggesting texts for initial research.

[160] Alyssa Battistoni, "Spadework." *N+1* (blog), May 1, 2019.; Michael Denning, "Everyone a Legislator," *New Left Review*, no. 129 (June 15, 2021): 29–44.; Gourevitch, "Themselves Must Strike the Blow."

[161] Levant and Kuhling, "Political Deskilling/Reskilling."

[162] Levant and Kuhling, "Political Deskilling/Reskilling," 216.

[163] Luxemburg, "Reform or Revolution."

do, the capacity for the creative planning and execution of goals." Sam Gindin writes, "Equally if not more important, they are also handing to someone else control over how that capacity to do is developed over time. The new owner of their labour power determines, through the organization of work and the division of labour, which skills are used and which are ignored or allowed to atrophy."[164] As I identified previously, political power *itself* is the labour in the military context, so in fact, in this context, the concepts of labour process deskilling and political deskilling overlap directly. How we socially define skill is a cultural product,[165] and so is its cultivation or atrophy. Under capitalism this is determined in the last instance by the interests of capital accumulation; the definition and cultivation of political skill is also a cultural product, and any counter-hegemonic movement not only has to work with the material it finds shaped by capital and the state, but also has to counter-culturally appropriate, recover, or build anew political skills for perhaps different modes of politics and political goals.

As already discussed, soldiering is a combination of many tasks – cleaning, cooking, construction, and also exercising political power and violence. The skills of politics can include all manner of positive and negative activities and abilities: deliberative capacities; relating socially to others; reasoning, study and knowledge; tactical and ethical questions; conflict resolution; and domination and deception. Definitionally, the organizational hierarchy has *deskilled* the directing out of that task already and by-definition. Recall Mary Wollstonecraft in chapter three: society should be "careful not to establish bodies of men who must necessarily be made foolish or vicious by the very constitution of their profession."[166] She identifies the material-shaping of character or subjectivity, and while her concern is more the political consequences of unvirtuous characters, she is identifying the material conditions that determine skills acquired and atrophied, perfected and prevented, that in capitalist society are consciously and unconsciously planned by (industrial or military) bosses' despotic organization of labour: "despotism is necessary to give vigour to

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[164] Sam Gindin, "Socialism with Sober Senses: Developing Worker's Capacities," *Socialist Register* 34 (1998), 78.

[165] Denning, "Representing Global Labor," 135.

[166] Wollstonecraft, *Vindications*, 38.

enterprises that one will directs."[167] The concept of deskilling is a modern way to identify a more long-standing phenomenon of the division of labour in a distinctly modern, proletarian idiom, by analogizing but also drawing connections between the social division of labour and the workplace division of labour.

5.5 Conclusion: Aftermath

> General, a man is very useful.
> He can fly and he can kill.
> But he has one defect:
> HE CAN THINK!
>
> –Bertolt Brecht, as quoted in *Barrage* (1972), G.I. newspaper, Fort Sill, Oklahoma[168]

This chapter has investigated the grievances, resistance, achievements, and repression of the phenomena of military unionism, particularly in the United States and the Netherlands. The most active period of soldier unionization in the advanced capitalist world, 1960-1980, represented in part a particular manifestation of the radicalism of the 1960s, channelled into the form of the trade union. The struggle for greater democratic rights for soldiers as workers in Western capitalist armies centered around pay and working conditions and power over the labour-process of military work itself. Trade unionism was one of the key expressions in this struggle because it was in many ways a class struggle over the labour process in the military, and over the changing material and ideological conditions of the working class writ large. In the Netherlands it was successful as a union movement. The radicalism of the moment expressed itself in the struggle over the aims of the work itself, with authoritarianism or political reaction identified in the organization both in its labour-processes and political-military aims abroad.

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[167] Wollstonecraft, *Vindications*, 36.

[168] "Issue 2 Barrage File (1971-1972)." Lawton-Ft. Sill Area Free Press, January 1972. GI Press Collection, 1964-1977, 13. The poem is 'From a German War Primer' (1937), the previous two stanzas included: "GENERAL, YOUR TANK IS A POWERFUL VEHICLE / It smashes down forests and crushes a hundred men. / But it has one defect: / It needs a driver./ General, your bomber is powerful. / It flies faster than a storm and carries more than an elephant. / But it has one defect: / It needs a mechanic. / General, man is very useful. / He can fly and he can kill. / But he has one defect: / He can think."

In the U.S., formal unionization was not as significant as the *discourse and study of* unionization; before it had the chance to get off the ground, the struggle was over. The phenomenon occurred alongside the more general transition to the all-volunteer force in many countries, including the United States. Informally, however, the ASU was highly significant. Though dismissed by authorities as unserious as a (conservatively understood) union or as a national security threat, the ASU's activities, networked as it was in the broader constellation of anti-war political life, were the greater target and were taken more seriously by the authorities, as we have seen in the cooptation efforts on the VOLAR era.

Underlying all this is a struggle over the alienation of capitalist class society. Historically, workers in strategic industries have been able and essential to making democratic claims upon the state; workers with power over key commodities and self-organization could exert that power to make demands on the state as well as their employers.[169] Soldiers have occupied such strategic positions, too, not only by virtue of being armed, but by being required to exercise state functions against state-adversaries or internal sources of 'disorder', such as with the case of the Fort Hood 43. State power or domination is never total; it depends in the final instance on people who in capitalist society are embedded in particular capitalist class relations. People, furthermore, contain inherent material power as a collective. That power of labour can be harnessed (in many individual units but never totally) by the ruling class (in the state or in capital forms) to be put to work for the increasing power of the ruling class, to fuel the lie of supremacy and dominance. But the bearers of labour-power the state and capital depend upon represent a threat as *potential* power located outside the nation-state's purview, even if it is typically (outside of true revolutionary moments) incapable of realizing that power for *itself*.

This incapacity, of soldiers and of the working class writ large, is both nurtured actively and by neglect. As discussed in this chapter, conventional militaries are de-skilled politically: they are subordinated to the military functions of their professional specialization which constitutionally separates the soldier from political skills through the authoritarian chain of command and military

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[169] Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (Verso, 2013).

subordination to the civilian government.[170] Soldiers surrender certain skills or capacities to *do*, to act, to make, to create, plan, and execute goals, handing control over how that "capacity to do" is developed over time to someone else. Through the military organization of work, chain of command, and division of labour, certain skills are cultivated and others are deliberately discouraged.[171] And furthermore, as presented in chapter three, conventional militaries (standing armies) de-skill politically the general population. In this way, the organization of the military, its internal division of labour and its place in the social division of labour, is already a particular way of organizing political *skill* and thereby *power* in society. Unionization therefore, even without rivalling the state for power, even as an idea, was intolerable to the United States by posing the very idea that orders could be questioned. The anti-Vietnam movement that the ASU was a small part of, fuelled this in a way that, we can speculate, made the U.S. authorities especially intolerant relative to, for example, the Netherlands, another NATO power with a colonial history and experiencing the 1960s counter-cultural movement. Furthermore, the US is famously one of the few countries in the world that has never produced a serious and enduring working class political party or labour party – or in other words, that has been the most successful at marginalizing working class political institutions and making organization that could contend for power impossible (while other countries have had to chip away at this power over the last century).[172] Lindy Heinecken hypothesizes that countries with labour parties in government are more likely to have soldiers unions.[173]

The soldiers union movement, as a left-wing politic, was a moment of opportunity that has closed for several reasons – beyond the U.S. making it a felony to form a military labour union. First, organizationally, advanced capitalist militaries have shifted from conscription-reliant models to volunteer forces combined heavily with private contractors. Second, technological shifts have

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[170] See: Morris Janowitz and Stephen D. Wesbrook, eds. *The Political Education of Soldiers* (Sage Publications, 1983).

[171] Gindin, "Socialism with Sober Senses," 78.

[172] Mike Davis, "Why the US Working Class Is Different," *New Left Review* 1, no. 123 (October 1980).

[173] "Typically, where some form of military unionism exists, it is in countries whose governments have come into power on the back of a strong labour movement." Lindy Heinecken, "Military Trade Unions: A Threat to National Security… Really?" *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 45, no. 2 (2017): 141.

substituted labour power for technology, touted as saving both 'enemy' lives through 'precision' aerial warfare, and soldiers' lives by operating at a distance and with fewer soldiers in direct harm's way.[174] Third, the war on terror enabled wider legitimacy of authoritarian powers on 'national security' grounds, making the political terrain of soldier activism even more hostile.

The transition from conscript- or partly-conscript-based militaries in advanced capitalist countries has had a significant impact on the soldier movement writ large. In the Netherlands, the VVDM ended in 1996 along with the end of conscription. The end of conscription was viewed as a success in many ways: in the U.S., for example, ending the draft was a major aim of the anti-war movement. The compulsion of service in the Netherlands too was a target of agitation for a generation that valued individual freedom and expression. But the volunteerization of these militaries at the same time removed a source of working-class and popular power. Advanced militaries shifted towards high-tech, low-labour-intensity structures; volunteer armies definitionally meant less political organization. Ideologically, the capitalist world generally shifted to a cultural understanding of most work as vocational; connecting career 'choice' to personal expression, therefore, armies recruited people less likely to militate within it and who would instead choose to leave if they became dissatisfied.

The fantastical aim of capital's logic is to transform labour into human machines that are predictable and capable but not thinking or vulnerable or insubordinate. The military hierarchy institutionalized this division of political labour that industrial production holds implicitly, and that radical unions try to contest; the military's relationship to technological experimentation and adoption has frequently been concerned with the human-machine substitutability as well.[175] Ultimately, 'mastery' is the aim in both capital's perspective and in military command: aiming "to control or alter a piece of the environment, an ego-alien situation, by the skillful use of perceptual, intellectual, and motor techniques in order to control or alter a piece of the environment" of which

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[174] This "post-heroic" warfare model is not without critics. Avi Kober, "The Israel Defense Forces in the Second Lebanon War: Why the Poor Performance?" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 3–40.

[175] "General William Westmoreland, while serving as chief of staff of the U.S. Army in 1969, claimed […] technologies would enhance both efficiency and effectiveness by substituting information for mass." Lindsay, *Information Technology and Military Power*, 15.

human labour is both a key component and obstacle.[176] Political deskilling and labour deskilling appear together in the soldier as they are political labour: the state is the political form of capitalist social relations, which are governed by class antagonism, and mystify the social powers of labour that comprise it. The state's monopoly of the legitimate use of violence is a class monopoly on the use of force and subject too, to class struggle. The union efforts of the mid-20th century are another episode in this long history, struggling for sovereignty over the labour of political violence. Sovereignty, the "social form of the state in a society where political power is divided between public and private spheres,"[177] is something to outgrow in the long term; but the struggle over it represents the struggle over collective labour, means of production, and therefore the totality of social life and the reappropriation of political power. The vision of this project is a dialectic advance, toward a collective labour of political life and beyond it to something we could call emancipation.

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[176] Ives Hendrick, "Work and the Pleasure Principle," *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, July 1, 1943, 314; see also: Benjamin Y. Fong, *Death and Mastery: Psychoanalytic Drive Theory and the Subject of Late Capitalism* (Columbia University Press, 2016).; Alan Sears, *Eros and Alienation: Capitalism and the Making of Gendered Sexualities* (Pluto Press, 2025).; Alexander Stoffel, *Eros and Empire: The Transnational Struggle for Sexual Freedom in the United States* (Stanford University Press, 2025).

[177] Rosenburg, *Empire of Civil Society*, 129.

Chapter 6
Epilogue

> The proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals, will have to abolish the very condition of their existence hitherto (which has, moreover, been that of all society up to the present), namely, labour. Thus they find themselves directly opposed to the form in which, hitherto, the individuals, of which society consists, have given themselves collective expression, that is, the State.[1]
>
> – Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*

The revolutionary horizon is not to reappropriate as individuals the power of violence amassed by the state, nor to become autonomous and unsullied by it as individuals. Rather the horizon is a collective project of organizing all political power, including the production of use values. Only with the end to historic suffering of capitalist social relations could violence as a form of politics be abolished along with its forms of labour and wealth in commodities of which it is composed.

As this project has demonstrated, the capitalist state's power is an arrogation of a massive complex of labour. Being bearers of commodity labour-power is a profound restriction on the development of human capacities, individually and on shared social life, objectively implicating us all in our own impersonal domination and the violent domination of others. One does not find in the historical materialist tradition a body of texts wrestling with the questions that the working-class soldier poses. This project performs that novel work of understanding the soldier in capitalist society as a social category of labour that produces the state capacity of political violence. It has interrogated the soldier as a form of capitalist social relations of appropriation, exploitation, and domination, and mystified thereby.

This project has recovered a history of thinking about state power's form as the result of class struggle for sovereignty over the labour of political violence (chapter three). Taking a new look at the Enlightenment militia debates over how to organize the labour of the state's repressive power for the benefit of "national defence", "political economy", and "social order", revealed a longer lineage of the themes of the debate that run through the political tradition beginning with Marx

[1] Marx and Engels, "Germany Ideology," 200.

and Engels' critical adaptation of the bourgeois republican militia tradition for a new revolutionary tradition: the self-emancipation of the international working class. This new telling of the militia question contributes to a historical materialist theory of the state's 'monopoly' on violence.

The project then presented an understanding of the implications of a conceptualization of class that emphasizes the ongoing primitive accumulation inherent to capitalism (chapter four). A Marxist Feminist framework shows how rather than disappearing into the state and the other side of the combatant-civilian binary for the duration service, the proletarian soldier continues to participate in the daily and generational reproduction of the working-class as whole, along with her participation in the reproduction of the state, capital, and consequently of all three, capitalist society writ large.

Having established common class ground between proletarians in and out of uniform, chapter five looked at the specificity of the military *labour* process as a place of politicized class struggle. Unionization efforts in the U.S. and the Dutch armed forces in the 1960s-70s reveal moments in an international movement of soldiers asserting themselves as workers and citizens. A struggle over capitalist-alienation, this episode shows how themes of division of the labour and power in society endure in democratic forms of capitalism. This moderated reinvigoration of the class struggle in the state over the labour of political violence explicitly wrestled with the normative weight of imperial class society.

In a capitalist mode of existence, politics is impoverished, when as a product of combined social labours it could be as limitless as human imagination. Marx's refusal to write the recipes from the cookshops of the future is still a good one. When the world's crises of climate and human existence seem impossible to confront let alone arrest, and there is no apparent recipe at hand to cook from nor a kitchen to cook in, and the land to grow the ingredients and the lives of the people to harvest it are wasted, optimism is hard to muster. If there is a solution to the labour of political violence, it is its critique made real on earth, its abolition.

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