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0521834163 - Soldiers of Labor: Labor Service in Nazi Germany and New Deal America, 1933-1945

Kiran Klaus Patel

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Soldiers of Labor

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

Kiran Klaus Patel is Assistant Professor of History at Humboldt University, Berlin. The German edition of this book was awarded the Prix de la Fondation Auschwitz (Brussels) and the Tiburtius Recognition Prize (Berlin).

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GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE
Washington, D.C.
and



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521834162

GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE
 1607 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20009

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First published as “*Soldaten der Arbeit*”: *Arbeitsdienste in Deutschland
 und den USA 1933-1945* by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in 2003
 English edition first published 2005

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Patel, Kiran Klaus.
 [Soldaten der Arbeit. English]
 Soldiers of labor : labor service in Nazi Germany and New Deal America,
 1933-1945 / Kiran Klaus Patel ; translated by Thomas Dunlap.
 p. cm. – (Publications of the German Historical Institute)
 Includes bibliographical references and index.
 ISBN 0-521-83416-3 (alk. paper)
 1. Germany. Reichsarbeitsdienst. 2. Labor service – Germany. 3. Labor service –
 United States. 4. National socialism. I. Title. II. Series.
 HD4870.3.G3P384I3 2005
 331.12'042'094309043-dc22 2004054765

ISBN-13 978-0-521-83416-2 hardback
 ISBN-10 0-521-83416-3 hardback

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0521834163 - Soldiers of Labor: Labor Service in Nazi Germany and New Deal America, 1933-1945

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of Charts and Illustrations</i>	page ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
Introduction	I
1 A Panacea for the Great Depression? Labor Service Ideas and Their Implementation Prior to 1933	22
1.1. <i>Precursors to the Labor Services</i>	22
1.2. <i>The Situation of Young People in the Great Depression</i>	32
1.3. <i>The Precursor in Germany: The FAD from 1931 to 1933 and the Involvement of the NSDAP</i>	41
2 Service to the Community: The Organization of the Labor Services	64
2.1. <i>False Start into the Third Reich: The Organization of the German Labor Service at the Beginning of the National Socialist Regime</i>	64
2.2. <i>From Consolidation to the War-time Deployment of the RAD</i>	94
2.3. <i>Between Ideology and Economics: The Admissions Criteria of the German Labor Service</i>	121
2.4. <i>The Organization of the Civilian Conservation Corps</i>	151
2.5. <i>Interim Conclusion</i>	181
3 “Citizens,” <i>Volksgenossen</i> , and Soldiers: Education in the Labor Services	190
3.1. <i>The Education Concept of the German Labor Service</i>	193
3.2. <i>“School of Manhood” between Prescription and Practice</i>	216
3.3. <i>“The School of the Nation”: Political Indoctrination and Organized Recreation</i>	239
3.4. <i>Education in the Civilian Conservation Corps</i>	261
3.5. <i>Interim Conclusion</i>	285

Cambridge University Press

0521834163 - Soldiers of Labor: Labor Service in Nazi Germany and New Deal America, 1933-1945

Kiran Klaus Patel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

Contents

4	In “The Grandeurs of Nature”: The Work of the Labor Services	292
	4.1. <i>Work Planning and Areas of Work in the German Labor Service</i>	293
	4.2. <i>Glorification and Pragmatic Compromise: The Concept and Practice of Work in the German Labor Service</i>	318
	4.3. <i>The Labor Service at Work: New Challenges in the Large-Scale Deployments Beginning in 1937</i>	340
	4.4. <i>Work in the Civilian Conservation Corps</i>	365
	4.5. <i>Interim Conclusion</i>	387
	<i>Concluding Reflections</i>	395
	<i>Abbreviations</i>	411
	<i>Sources and Bibliography</i>	415
	<i>Index</i>	439

Cambridge University Press

0521834163 - Soldiers of Labor: Labor Service in Nazi Germany and New Deal America, 1933-1945

Kiran Klaus Patel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Charts and Illustrations

CHARTS

1	Budget funds spent for the German Labor Service for men	<i>page</i> 108
2	Magnitude of job-creation measures in the German Reich 1933–1934	141
3	National income, state expenditures, and labor service budgets	188
4	Daily schedule in the German Labor Service	210
5	Daily schedule in the CCC	268

ILLUSTRATIONS

1	Hitler reviewing RAD workers on parade at the 1936 NSDAP party rally. RAD director Hierl stands in the foreground.	93
2	The organization of the RAD.	119
3	The growth of the German Labor Service through 1935.	137
4	“The CCC is composed almost entirely of young men, ages 17 to 23. However, a limited number of older men are enrolled among the Veterans, Indians, and Territorials.”	163
5	“There are some 150 CCC camps for colored boys. This enrollee-cook will have a good meal ready for the boys when they come in from the day’s work.”	174
6	Basic layout of an RAD camp.	205
7	“Returning from the Construction Site.”	219
8	RAD workers on parade during an inspection.	222
9	Layout of a typical CCC camp.	265
10	“In all Camps fifteen minutes of ‘setting up exercises’ are given the first thing in the morning.”	273
11	“A group of CCC boys plan their evening’s recreation as they change from their work clothes at the end of the day.”	281
12	“Work in the mountains.”	309

Cambridge University Press

0521834163 - Soldiers of Labor: Labor Service in Nazi Germany and New Deal America,
1933-1945

Kiran Klaus Patel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

Charts and Illustrations

13	RAD worker laying sewage pipe.	314
14	RAD workers reinforcing an embankment.	346
15	“Learning a lot about strip-cropping, terracing, and the saving of farm lands from waste.”	366
16	“Working amid Nature’s grandeur.”	369

Cambridge University Press

0521834163 - Soldiers of Labor: Labor Service in Nazi Germany and New Deal America, 1933-1945

Kiran Klaus Patel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

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

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

Very personal thanks are due to Heinrich August Winkler. He supervised the dissertation on which this book is based with impressive knowledge and deep engagement. I am very grateful to Gisela Bock for her support and numerous helpful suggestions. From the very beginning of my work on the Reichsarbeitsdienst and the Civilian Conservation Corps, Ludolf Herbst, Jürgen Kocka, and Ger van Roon were very supportive and provided generous critical comments. Each of them spurred on my work. For their helpful comments and suggestions, I would also like to thank Peter Dudek, Philipp Gassert, Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich, Christoph Jahr, Egbert Klautke, Hans Mommsen, Paul Nolte, Michael Schneider, Wolfgang Schivelbusch, Theda Skocpol, Siegfried Weichlein, and Patrik von zur Mühlen. My manuscript also greatly benefited from careful readings by Manuel Borutta, Paula Diehl, Stephan Fitos, Moritz Föllmer, Sebastian Panwitz, Harald Wiggenhorn, and, especially, Christian Illian. I am indebted to Monika Roßteuscher for her organizational help. My student research assistants, Heike Wieters and Andres Kohla, performed many services, and I thank them. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to express my gratitude to three friends to

Cambridge University Press

0521834163 - Soldiers of Labor: Labor Service in Nazi Germany and New Deal America, 1933-1945

Kiran Klaus Patel

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii

Preface

whom the book owes a great deal: Alexander Cammann, Jens Hacke, and Kai Uwe Peter.

In addition to the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Bonn), the Graduate Colloquium “Comparative Social Studies in Historical, Sociological, and Ethnologic Perspective” (Berlin), and the German Historical Institute – all of which generously gave financial and organizational support to this project – I am indebted to the Fondation Auschwitz in Brussels for awarding the German edition of this study its Prix de la Fondation Auschwitz. Likewise, I am grateful to the Landeskonferenz der Rektoren und Präsidenten der Berliner Hochschulen, which awarded “*Soldaten der Arbeit*” the Tiburtius Recognition Prize.

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

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

Berlin, October 2004

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